

THE NOVELS OF
ALEXANDRE DUMAS

CROP-EARED
JACQUOT

PQ
2223
A44
1905

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CROP-EARED JACQUOT
AND OTHER STORIES



I GALLOPED AS HARD AS I COULD GO

1844
THE NOVELS OF ALEXANDRE DUMAS

CROP-EARED JACQUOT *Lit*
AND OTHER STORIES *Librarian's H*

NEWLY TRANSLATED BY
ALFRED ALLINSON

NEVER BEFORE TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH

WITH THREE ILLUSTRATIONS BY
GORDON BROWNE

METHUEN & CO.
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INTRODUCTION

CROP-EARED JACQUOT is a Russian story, an attempt—and a highly successful one—to reconstruct a picture of Russia in the latter years of the Eighteenth Century, when the power of the great Muscovite nobles was still largely unchecked, and the wild doings of an earlier and ruder period still possible, though rapidly becoming an anachronism.

The tale takes its title from its narrator,—old Jacquot, who in his prime had been chief huntsman to the Prince Alexis Ivanovitch Groubenski, grandfather of Prince Danilo, the lord of Groubenski at the time (1828) of the narration, and known in his own day as “the last of the Boyars.” How Jacquot lost his ears in single combat with Saukinsin, his brutal master’s pet bear, how he recovered the tyrant’s favour by risking his life at the terrible sport of the *rejak* on the half-frozen Volga, and generally how little real cause the faithful fellow had to bless the old Prince’s memory, the reader must discover from the book itself.

For all this, Jacquot is a consistent “laudator temporis acti,” and never weary of contrasting his admired (if dreaded) master with the degenerate nobles of latter days. “In those times a great Lord lived like a great Lord; but to-day . . . everything is grown mean and petty, and the glories of yore fall and fade away more and more every day. . . . Consider the state our nobles are come to! There are some positively not ashamed to engage in trade, while others have married merchants’ daughters, and keep their ledgers posted with their own hands. They might just as well let their beards grow at once, and wear their trousers tucked into their boots, and the shirt over the trousers. . . . Well now, think of it, little father, here is our master, Danilo Borisovitch; well, he has still a thousand souls left, or thereabouts, so he could be a great lord if he would. Well, I ask you, does he look like a great nobleman? does he act like one? He has studied at Moscow, at a University—how do they call the thing? it passes my understanding—for all the world like a shopkeeper’s son, and sat there on the same benches—so they tell me, though I am bound to say I can scarce credit it—on the same benches with the shoemakers’ and the tailors’ lads!”

A grim and terrible figure this Prince Alexis,—something of the “Old Q.,” or the “bad Lord Lonsdale,” of Scotch and North Country tradition, but on a larger scale, with greater opportunities of evil, and a greater record of wild and wicked deeds.

The account of the Great Fair of Makarieff and the truly paternal authority

exercised by the Prince over the thousands gathered there, of the birthday festivities at the Castle of Groubenski and of his Highness's tame poet, Semione Tetich, are good reading,—as are, in a more sensational vein, the catastrophe of the gentle Princess Varvara's end and the gruesome discovery made by Prince Danilo in the "Pink Pavilion."

The book was published at Brussels in 1860,—the year after Dumas' return from his travels in Russia and the Caucasus, which occupied some ten months of 1858–59. In his characteristic "Avant-Propos," Dumas probably gives himself less credit for his share in the writing of the story than he was entitled to claim.

Jane, published in 1859, was also one of the several satisfactory literary results of the Russian tour. Although the action takes place in Holland, the tale is a typically Russian one, and was, as Dumas himself says, based on a work by Marlinsky. We shall have an opportunity in a future volume of saying something about this remarkable man.

The three stories with which the present volume closes are all by the celebrated Russian poet and novelist Poushkin. Dumas, who admired them greatly, had them translated shortly after his arrival in Russia for the readers of his journal. Subsequently they were printed in the *Œuvres Complètes*. By way of an introduction to these stories we print Dumas' account of their author, taken from the *Impressions de Voyage*.

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CROP-EARED JACQUOT

INTRODUCTION

THE tale I am going to tell you is the life history of the Chief Huntsman of a Boyar, or great Russian Feudatory, the very last representative perhaps of the old Muscovite manners and customs of the days of Peter the Great and Biren.

True, my story will have more to say about the master and the mistress than about the man, and might be entitled *The Princess Varvara* or *The Prince Groubenski* equally as well as *Crop-eared Jacquot*. But what would you have? In an age when an author's first preoccupation is to discover a name for his novel or play, even before he has found a subject, and when more than half his chance of success depends upon the title, *Crop-eared Jacquot* really seems to me to be startling and original enough duly to arouse my readers' curiosity. So *Crop-eared Jacquot* it shall be!

I had often heard talk both at St. Petersburg and Moscow, and still more at Nijni-Novgorod, of the Prince Alexis Ivanovitch Groubenski. The most incredible eccentricities were related of him; but these eccentricities, pronounced enough to shock the maddest of Englishmen, were, even as pieces of rough humour, over-shadowed by a sinister cloud of gloom and horror, that seemed to brood over all this nobleman's strange life. You felt that, albeit half effaced by time and by the efforts of interested persons whose wish it was to remove the stain altogether, the life of the *Last of the Boyars*, as he was generally called in the Government of Nijni-Novgorod, was disfigured by one of those grim blotches of dark red, such as they show dyeing the floor of the *Galérie aux Cerfs* at Fontainebleau and the Royal Closet at Blois—the sign-manual of ancient bloodshed.

Everywhere I had been advised, "If

ever you happen to stop at Makarieff, remember to pay a visit to the ruins facing the Monastery, on the opposite bank of the Volga—the ruins of the Castle of Groubenski. Aboveall," people invariably added, "do not forget to ask to see the Portrait Gallery."

None but such as have been my travelling companions can properly appreciate the degree of obstinacy I am capable of under circumstances of this sort. Once I nose a legend, a tradition, a bit of history, no objection or opposition whatsoever will turn me from the scent, once the hunt is up.

Accordingly, I had not failed to exact a promise from the skipper of the steamer I had boarded to convey me from Nijni to Kasan, to stop under any circumstances at Makarieff, whether the boat passed that place by day or by night. And, as a matter of fact, the instant we hove in sight—I will not say of Makarieff, for Makarieff is not actually visible from the surface of the Volga—but of the battlemented walls of the old Monastery, which comes down to the banks of the stream there, the Captain was as good as his word, and sought me out to tell me—

"You must be getting ready, Sir, if you still mean to get off at Makarieff; we shall be there in ten minutes."

Ten minutes more, and we *were* there; and in obedience to my beckoning, a boatman put off from the left bank of the Volga and struck out for the steamer, to put me ashore.

Then, and not till then, I noticed a young Russian officer, with whom I had exchanged a few words of casual talk during my passage down the river, to be engaged in the same preparations as myself.

"Are you by any chance getting off at Makarieff, Sir?" I asked him.

"Alas! yes, Sir; I am on garrison duty there."

"Your 'alas!' is not over and above flattering to Makarieff."

"'Tis an abominable hole, and I cannot help asking you how ever you come, without exterior compulsion, to be stopping there. What in Heaven's name have you to do at Makarieff?"

"Two most important things. I am going to buy a carved chest, and I am going to pay a visit to the Castle of Groubenski. Indeed, I am bound to confess that, when I saw you were getting your baggage together, I congratulated myself on the very thing that occasions your despair. Knowing your kindness and courtesy, I said to myself, 'Ha, ha! here's a cicerone ready found to help me make my bargain and make my visit.'"

"As far as that goes," the young officer assured me, "you are not mistaken, and it is I shall be obliged to you for filling up my time. Distractions are few and far between at Makarieff; you offer me that of your society, and I accept it gratefully. It is the honey nurses put on the rim of the cup, when they want to get children to take medicine. Now, you must permit me to lay down some conditions to our bargain."

"Out with them; I agree to them beforehand."

"You understand this, that since the removal of the great fair to Nijni-Novgorod, nobody ever stops at Makarieff nowadays."

"Except people coming to buy a chest and visit the Castle of Groubenski!"

"True; but such people are extremely rare. Anyhow, the fact remains, there is no inn at Makarieff, or if there is, it is of such a sort as to make it worse than there being none."

"Ah, I see what you are driving at. You are going to offer me board and lodging. I am used to these little Russian peculiarities."

"Yes, that is precisely what I am going to do."

"Another man might hesitate about accepting your kindness, but I say 'Yes' right out;" and, so saying, I gave him my hand.

"Faith," said he, "I was far from expecting such luck. Let's get into our boat at once;" for the shore-boat that was to convey us to land had just ranged alongside the steamer.

I said good-bye to the skipper and sundry persons with whom I had scraped

acquaintance during my three days' sail on the Volga, and proceeded to take my seat in the skiff, whither my young companion followed me.

"Ah! so here you are, Count?" the boatman exclaimed on recognising him. "Why, the carriage has been waiting for you ever since yesterday evening."

"Yes," replied the young man, "I fully expected to have arrived yesterday; but these wretched boats are as slow as tortoises. . . . And is all well at Makarieff?"

"Yes, Count, praise God, all is well."

"Now, I hoped he was going to inform me that the town had been burnt down, that not a house was left standing, and that the garrison had been recalled to St. Petersburg, or, at any rate, moved on to Kasan. But nothing, nothing whatever, has happened. Well, God's will be done;" and the Count heaved a sigh as heartfelt as if he had veritably wished to find the town burnt to the ground.

A carriage and a man-servant in French livery awaited us on the quay—the carriage not a droszky at all, but a well-appointed American buggy.

The sight raised my highest hopes—to wit, that in the room my host was going to give me I should find a bed and washhand-stand, two articles I had not met with in one and the same apartment since leaving Moscow. I was not disappointed. Count Vaninkof's house—Vaninkof was my young officer's name—was furnished in French fashion, and I found within a verst of the Volga a replica, more or less exact, of my Paris bedroom.

Tea was awaiting us—real Russian tea, I was thankful to see, full-flavoured and fragrant, and brewed, moreover, with all the exquisite art a Muscovite servant is master of in the matter of tea-making.

As we emptied our glasses—in Russia tea is drunk from glasses, ladies only being allowed cups—we arranged that next day after breakfast would be the time for our excursion to the Castle of Groubenski; and the same evening orders were given for a boat to be at our disposal between ten and eleven the following morning.

Also before breakfast we were to inspect—Count Vaninkof and myself—two or three shops containing the best assortment of carved chests in the town.

At nine o'clock the Count was up and

about, and we started to roam the town through—driving, of course, for like the complete Russian gentleman he was, our young Captain was incapable, unless absolutely obliged, of walking a hundred yards anywhere.

I bought two chests, which, needless to remark, my host insisted on paying for. No help for it, it is the custom of the country—and a very agreeable custom too—and you are bound to submit.

After an excellent breakfast—my host boasted a French cook—we had the carriage out again, then took boat, and crossed to the other side of the Volga. There a couple of saddle-horses were in readiness, their bridles held by two grooms. There was a hill about as high as Montmartre to climb; but this was far too heavy an undertaking for a Russian officer to attempt on foot—one of the men who scale the peaks of the Caucasus by mountain-tracks known only to the chamois and the bouquetins, when it becomes a question of bringing Schamyl to bay among the clouds or in the precipitous gorges of his native mountains.

We mounted, and in ten minutes more found ourselves face to face with the ruins of the Castle of Groubenski. It was a magnificent edifice built towards the latter end of the eighteenth century from the plans of the celebrated architect Rastrelli, the same who designed the Winter Palace at St. Petersburg and the Czarina's Palace near Moscow. Abandoned for perhaps thirty or forty years past, it has suffered the fate of every neglected building—that is to say, with the exception of a few of the offices, a single gallery, and a single pavilion, it lies in ruins.

At its feet, at the very moment when its life expired, a nondescript fishing village, Niskevo by name, had sprung into existence; and from the summit of its hill the old-time Residency stood scornfully looking down upon the youthful activity of this child of yesterday.

True, by carrying its gaze further afield and looking towards the Volga, the granite spectre of the old Castle might behold the Monastery of Makarieff; and perhaps the two ancients, of nights, when all is asleep around, may by help of the wind hold mysterious discourse with one another touching the mutability of human creations—the Castle deploring

the days when its saloons and pavilions and galleries sparkled with lights and echoed to the tread of crowds of guests and merry-makers, the sound of music and the shock of glasses; the Monastery bewailing the seasons of sacred solemnity, when it spoke aloud to sixty vassal villages by the voice of its twelve bells and the chants of its two hundred monks.

Nowadays a poor dozen monks only inhabit the Monastery. As for the Castle, the illustrious race of its masters is extinct, and it belongs to the Farmer of the local taxes, a certain Master Kirdiapine, whose father was third waiter once upon a time at Razzoulai's Hotel, the best inn in Makarieff in the days when Makarieff still possessed inns—in other words, when Makarieff still had a fair.

We had driven from Makarieff to the Volga, we had ferried over from the right to the left bank of that river, we had climbed the hill leading to the ruins; but so far we had accomplished only the easier half of our pilgrimage. We had still to get hold of the keys of the Castle.

The fact is, the two or three servants to whom had been intrusted the care of these venerable ruins, never dreaming anybody would take it into his head to visit them, and never fearing any wreckers would think it worth their while to knock them about, had very reasonably concluded they might just as well absent themselves a while, in order to offer their services to shipowners as stevedores and porters. By this means they were enabled every day to enjoy the luxury of drinking a glass or two of tea, with sugar to match, seated comfortably together round the same table, which is the greatest treat imaginable among men of the labouring class in Russia.

On this particular occasion they had begun the day as they intended to finish it, and though it was barely midday, my three fine fellows were already installed at the tavern.

However, one of the party agreed to move on receiving a promise of twenty copeks, which the Count's man took it upon himself to make, and he started up the hill keys in hand.

To find the fellow and strike the bargain had taken pretty near an hour; but meantime we had employed our time to good advantage. Slipping through a breach in the wall, we had made our way into the gardens, which formerly belonged,

and presumably belong still, to the Castle. They formed a vast enclosure, quite a couple of versts in length, and which, after stretching along the level summit of the hill, finally sloped down to the banks of the Volga. But here time had produced an effect exactly the opposite to its destructive power on the buildings, and the result was beneficent and picturesque. Left to themselves, the trees had attained a gigantic size when standing isolated, while those united in groups had interlaced their boughs in the most wonderful profusion of greenery. Certain lime avenues were especially magnificent; the trees must have been planted many years ago, under the Queen Elizabeth, and were grown so thick and impenetrable to the sun's rays that the moment you entered their shade you seemed to have descended into a mine, and to be threading one of those subterranean corridors that pierce the bowels of the Ural Mountains.

In some places, closing the vista of one of these avenues or marking the centre of lawns now all overgrown with weeds and brambles, stone pedestals were still to be seen, in which statues had once stood—masterpieces, or at any rate copies of the masterpieces, of antiquity. On one of them you could still make out the letters JOV . . . OMNIPOT . . ., and on another the dedication, *To Venus and Adonis*.

On quitting the main avenue and turning off to the left we came across the deep bed of an artificial stream, now all but dried up; though far down in the depths there still ran a tiny thread of limpidly clear water, flowing from a neighbouring spring, which we had all the difficulty in the world to discover, hidden as it was in the tall grass. No doubt this watercourse had once been the fairest ornament of the garden, which it traversed from end to end, winding in graceful curves, while several arches, thrown boldly and picturesquely across the ravine, formed bridges, still in substantial repair, though their utility was altogether a thing of the past.

In the most retired corner of the park we lighted on the remains of a detached Pavilion. It had once been the rendezvous of Prince Alexis and his courtiers; but alas! years ago the winter storms, its only visitors now, had torn away doors and windows, and scattered them far and wide. If only these walls, which in their prime possessed both eyes and ears, had had a tongue, no doubt they could have

told tales to-day to make the stones of Monceaux and the Grand Trianon blush with shame. But they are dumb and silent, save when the hurricane lends them a voice—a voice that in sad and sombre tones ever proclaims to the monuments of men's hands what experience ever teaches men themselves: "There is naught sure and naught eternal save only Death!"

In the interior were still discernible a series of mythological frescoes in very fair preservation. They were undoubtedly the work of a French artist of the school of Boucher, and represented Venus and Mars captured in the nets of Vulcan, the Rape of Europa by the White Bull, whose shape Jupiter had borrowed, Leda amorously pressing to her bosom the Divine Swan, concluding with a picture of Diana bathing and surprised by Actæon. The ceiling had fallen in.

Facing this Pavilion was a heap of stones and bricks almost completely overgrown with brambles and ivy. I asked my young friend if he knew what was the origin of this accumulation of *débris*.

"I think I remember their saying," he told me, "on the first occasion of my visiting the ruins, that this was the remains of another Pavilion, the fellow to the first."

"Did it fall in from decay?" was my next question.

"No; it was destroyed intentionally, by what I was told."

"And for what reason, do you happen to know?"

"I know the story commonly told to account for it."

"And what is the story? I give you fair warning, I am the most persistent asker of questions ever was in this world."

"The story goes that the last Prince Danilo Alexiovitch, on a visit here twenty-five or thirty years ago, made so strange a discovery in this Pavilion, that not only did he resolve to demolish it, but actually drove in the first pickaxe with his own hand."

"And what did he find in the said Pavilion, eh?"

"Ah, that is just where the mystery comes in! They speak of a walled-up, barricaded, condemned cell, into which nobody had ever thought, or rather dared, to penetrate. Prince Danilo did so, the tale continues, without saying a word to any one, and by the living Lord! saw something so appalling, he came

out again looking as pale as a dead man, and promptly ordered the whole building to be razed to the ground, as I mentioned before."

At this moment we saw approaching the servant of Master Kirdiapine, the new owner of the Castle, the individual who had been unearthed from the tavern by the promise of twenty copeks. I questioned him about the demolished Pavilion; but he knew even less of the matter than Captain Vaninkof, who, as we have already seen, did not know very much.

However, the fellow had the keys of the Castle, and volunteered to show us the interior. I readily accepted his offer, hoping to light on something that might establish a connection between the Castle and the mysterious Pavilion.

The man led the way, taking us in by a side door opening into the vestibule. No sooner was this door thrown back than a damp air, saturated, as it were, with antiquity and smelling of decay, set us coughing. Every step we took on the flags raised a heavy cloud of dust, while the wind, which had followed us through the open door, tossed the torn and tattered remnants, still hanging on the walls, of superb tapestry, which must originally have come straight from the Gobelins as the gift of some reigning prince or king.

"The best-preserved part of the building," our guide informed us, "is the Portrait Gallery."

Seeing it was in all likelihood the most interesting too, we told him to take us there, sacrificing the rest of the ruins to its claims.

I cannot tell whether it was fancy or reality, whether it was a result of the original brush-work or of the way the pictures were lighted, but it struck me that these portraits, with their darkened tints, one and all cast upon us, who came disturbing them in their age-long silence and solitude, looks of hatred and displeasure. From their richly carved frames, twisted and warped, however, by age, they seemed ready to cry out, "Who are you, rash visitors, indiscreet troublers of the dead? Who has given you any right to disturb the silence of the past? Begone; we know you not, and we are equally unknown to you. Yes, you may look at us, and question us, you will learn nothing of our wild lives and tumultuous pleasures, our

Homeric banquets and our unbridled passions."

"This is the Prince Alexis Andreovitch Groubenski," our guide said, as if in answer to the unspoken question I was addressing to the most modern of the series.

My eyes were fixed on the portrait of a man of tall stature. His high forehead, heavy eyebrows, Roman nose, and strongly projecting lower lip proclaimed a vigorous and energetic will equally implacable and irresistible. The mouth wore a smile, but the smile had something wild-beastish and menacing in it. I felt sure that at the smallest hint of opposition the brow must have puckered with savage hate, the dark, crafty eyes, caught in a moment of comparative softness by the painter, must have flashed with the lurid glare of overmastering anger.

Next to the Prince, wearing a costume of the time of Louis XVI.—and as is generally known, Russia was, in matters of dress, always some years behind her model France—hung a portrait of a tall, handsome woman. She was dressed in a robe of yellow satin, trimmed with lace such as was worn towards the end of Louis XVI.'s reign, which would make her contemporary, taking her countrywomen's old-fashioned ways into account, with the early years of the First Empire. The face was charming, the eyes expressing a bright, keen intelligence united with an inexplicable tinge of sadness. Without a shadow of doubt the woman had been unhappy in her life, and if she had enjoyed some brief moments of joy, they had been but lightning flashes, come and gone in an instant.

"That is the Princess Marfa Petrovna," the servant informed me, noticing the attention I was bestowing on this portrait, which represented the wife of the Prince Alexis. But my eyes had already left her figure, interesting as it was, to travel to another female portrait.

This last wore a blue dress, with a long waist, stiffened with whalebones, such as were still fashionable at the Russian Court as late as 1806 or 1807. Her figure was slim, and held coquettishly; her hand, charmingly shaped, and full of aristocratic elegance, held a spray of verbenas. But, strange to say, the face of this alluring being was entirely obliterated by means of a huge smear of black paint!

"Whose portrait is that?" I asked eagerly of the man who had named the others for me.

"Ah," he answered, "that portrait! As to that one, we have only guess-work to go upon; nobody knows for certain. But the most generally received version would seem to be that it represents the Prince Alexis' daughter-in-law, wife of the Prince Boris Alexiovitch, and mother of the last Prince—Prince Danilo."

"But why the blotch of black paint across the face?"

"God only knows; likely the lady was plain."

"Is there no tradition on the subject?" The man hesitated.

"It does not do to believe everything we are told," he said at length.

"Well, but come, what *are* we told?" I asked.

But he only shook his head.

"There is only one man alive who knows the real truth of the matter," he declared, "and he has always refused to speak."

"And who is this man?"

"You know him, my Lord," the fellow answered, turning to the Count.

"I do?" exclaimed the young Captain, in some surprise.

"Yes! I mean Crop-eared Jacquot."

"Whose grandson is in my father's service?"

"Precisely."

"What! is he alive still?"

"He has just attained his hundredth year."

"And where does he live?" I asked.

"At Makarieff."

"Do you hear that, Captain?"

"Yes. But, it seems, he had made a vow, if he lived to be a hundred, that he would perform a pilgrimage to the Cloister of Troitza. He reached his hundred the day before yesterday, and yesterday he started for the Monastery."

"By the Lord, I have no sort of luck!" I cried, greatly disappointed.

"Well, now, look here," said the Captain, addressing me, "if you will stay another day at Makarieff with me, I will promise you something."

"What will you promise me?"

"To watch for Jacquot's return, to make him tell me the whole history of Prince Alexis Groubenski from one end to the other, and to send it to you."

"Will you really do that, Count?"

"I will, upon my word of honour."

"Then I will stay with you, not only one day, but two."

And, truly, I would have stayed not two days only, but a week, a fortnight, a month, if I had not had my two travelling companions waiting for me at Kasan.

He was a most charming fellow, was this Count Vaninkof, and, what is more important, a man of his word. The proof of which is, that I duly received, two months after my return to France, the manuscript I print below. The reader will find it absolutely unaltered, for, fearing to diminish its authenticity, I have changed nothing whatsoever except the title.

It was originally headed "Days of Yore," and appeared to be written by a former Intendant of the Prince Danilo, son of Prince Boris and grandson of Prince Alexis. Where and how Count Vaninkof unearthed the manuscript, I have not an idea, nor do I suppose it is of much concern to my readers to know these facts.

If it amuses them,—that is the one thing needful.

CHAPTER I

THE PINK PAVILION

IT was on June 17, 1828, that we arrived at the Castle of Groubenski—Prince Danilo and myself.

Prince Danilo did not know the Castle, having been brought up at St. Petersburg, and never having visited it during the lifetime of his grandfather, the Prince Alexis, who had died some two years ago.

Prince Danilo had just lost his father, the Prince Boris, and had wished to judge for himself what this same Castle of Groubenski was like, of which he had heard so much talk.

We arrived about ten o'clock at night, and the Prince retired immediately, being very much fatigued. Next morning, about eight o'clock, I was summoned to his room, where I found him still in bed.

"Ivan," he said to me, directly he saw me, "what is the howling I have heard all night long, and which has prevented me closing my eyes for one single minute?"

"Doubtless, my Lord," I replied, "it is the dogs in the kennels, which have scented the approach of game during the night."

"Oh ho!" cried Prince Danilo Borisovitch, frowning; "so there are kennels, are there, at the Castle?"

"Why, certainly!" I hastened to answer, thinking to give him an agreeable piece of news. "Your Highness possesses a magnificent pack—five hundred hounds, a hundred and twenty setters, and sixty greyhounds. As for kennelmen, I suppose you have a good forty of them."

"So my establishment," exclaimed the Prince, "embraces between six and seven hundred dogs, and forty men to look after them?"

"There or thereabouts, my Lord," was my answer.

"But these confounded animals," resumed the Prince, "must eat as much bread in a day as would suffice to feed a hundred and fifty poor people for a whole month."

"Oh, never mind that, my Lord!"

"Well, I must beg you, Ivan, to make such arrangements that all these dogs are hanged or drowned this very evening. As for the kennelmen, you will put them on work of some sort or another, while such as can make a living elsewhere, you will discharge. The money that was spent in keeping up the pack we will devote to the foundation of a primary school at Makarieff or Niskevo."

"Your Excellency shall be obeyed," I answered; and I made my bow and went out to give orders that the six hundred and eighty dogs, hounds and greyhounds and all, should be drowned or hanged that evening, as his Highness thought good to command.

But half an hour later, just as preparations were beginning for carrying out this wholesale execution, the Prince was confronted by an old man of sixty or thereabouts. His face was wrinkled, and his long white hair fell on his shoulders. He had not a tooth left in his head, but his eyes shone with a fire that proved he was still far from having reached the last days of his life.

His dress consisted of a coat of raspberry-coloured velvet with gold embroidery, leather breeches, and great French knee-boots, as they are called. A Circassian girdle confined his waist, and a hunting-knife hung at his side, while he held an old-fashioned three-cornered hat in his hand.

Though somewhat uncompromising, as we have seen, towards dogs, Prince

Danilo, who was a philanthropist, was first-rate with men. Accordingly, he received the old fellow with great affability, and asked him who he was.

"Saving your respect, Excellency," the man answered, in a firm voice, "I am an old serf of your Highness. I am called Crop-eared Jacquot, and I was at the time of his death first Squire to the Prince Alexis, your grandfather."

Doubtless this name of Crop-eared Jacquot was not unknown to Prince Danilo, for he cast a rapid glance at the place where the ears should have been, but whose absence had earned for poor Jacquot the nickname by which he was universally known.

"Welcome, friend," said Prince Danilo, "and sit ye down; you are tired, perhaps?"

"I thank your Highness; but it would not be becoming for me to sit in your Excellency's presence. I am come merely to prostrate myself at your feet, and beseech you to grant my prayer."

"What prayer, my good fellow?" asked Danilo Borisovitch.

"They tell me, your Highness has thought good to visit your princely displeasure upon us."

"What is wrong with you, my poor Jacquot? You are not going crazy by any chance, eh?"

"Ah! your Highness, and there would be nothing wonderful if we did go crazy to see such cruelty—the massacre in cold blood of six hundred and eighty poor beasts that have hurt nobody! Why, indeed, your Excellency, 'tis nothing more nor less than the slaughter of the Holy Innocents by King Herod! What harm have the poor dogs done your Highness? Believe me, 'tis no laughing matter to shed so much blood, and though it is only the blood of brute beasts, I say you shall answer for it all the same before God."

"Enough, I say—enough! I have made up my mind; so stop . . ."

But the old man fearlessly interrupted his lord and master.

"And why should I stop? Am I not the only defender God has given these poor beasts? If I hold my tongue, who will speak up for them? I will not stop. How can you be so inhuman, Excellency, as to massacre these poor, poor dogs? For, after all, the pack, established by your ancestors long ago, is part of the family, and has existed, always renewed,

yet always the same, for more than a hundred years. Its fame, after spreading through all the Russias, has penetrated even to France. It has been talked of at foreign Courts, and Sovereigns have written by their own or others' hands to your ancestors to beg a specimen of the breed; and lo! in a moment, for no reason whatever, you would destroy this world-renowned pack! What can you be thinking of, my little father?" cried the old man, warming to his work. "I tell you, if you did such a deed, your fathers' bones would turn in their graves, and the spectre of poor Prince Alexis would start from his coffin to point its fleshless finger at you and curse you. . . . Remember, my dear and honoured master—remember the kennels of the Groubenskis have existed and have been ever growing since the reign of Peter the Great of glorious memory! What, what can induce you to attack them so savagely to-day? Think how the massacre of the Strelitz was a blot the Great Emperor found it hard to rid himself of, and yet the Strelitz were guilty, which the poor dogs are not. It would indeed be, for you and your princely descendants, an eternal disgrace, an everlasting humiliation, to have no pack of hounds, to say nothing of the remorse of conscience you must ever feel within yourself at the thought of such a foul murder. The dog, your Highness, is one of God's creatures like the rest, and it is written in the Scriptures, 'Blessed the man which shall love animals!' Then how can you, little father, whose face is kind—how can you act so against God's will and pleasure? . . . You see, Excellency, I have put on, to present myself before you, the same costume I used to wear when I had the honour to be confidential groom—Squire, in other words—to your grandfather of gorgeous memory, the good Count Alexis. The costume has not left the wardrobe for the last six years, and I never thought to put it on again, except to be buried in it. See, too, Highness, I have donned the Circassian girdle that he gave me three days after the thrice-happy arrival of your mother at the Castle, when you were still a babe in the cradle, little father. Three days after her coming, which gave cause for much apprehension to all us retainers, but which his Highness made a blessing to everybody, a great hunting-party was held. Not one of us could run the fox

to earth, unless it were our neighbour, Ivan Ramiroff, who all but got him; seeing this, I dashed off after the cunning brute, and caught him. Yes, I caught him, I did, and saved the honour of the house. Well! I have said my say; you must act as you hold good, my dear and honoured master. Only I will not leave this room till I have got mercy for my poor dogs."

"Well, what would you have, then?" asked the Prince, who began to be melted by this long and fervent appeal.

"I would have your promise, if it is still your Excellency's gracious pleasure to have the dogs hanged or drowned, first to cut off my head. Then you can massacre the poor innocent beasts at your leisure, and never a voice will be raised in their defence. But, dressed as I am and wearing this girdle you see, I will present myself before your father, your grandfather, your forebears and ancestors; I will show them my poor dogs slaughtered, and the men who guarded them as lovingly and carefully as the apple of their eye, left to starve. What will they say at such a sight?—I ask you that. I am a man of other days," the old man went on, shaking his head, "and your modern ways are strange to me; so send me as soon as may be to join my masters, whose habits I respected, and who loved me because I loved my poor dogs."

The old man had come to the end of his strength. The violent excitement he had undergone was succeeded by a state of complete collapse. His voice failed him, his breathing grew spasmodic, his legs trembled beneath him, and he would have fallen backwards, had not the Prince thrown his arm about him.

He was carried out unconscious; but the vigorous intervention of old Crop-eared Jacquot saved the pack, and the kennels, though destined to be abolished later on, were preserved for the time being.

And not only were the kennels saved, but the Prince Danilo Borisovitch went further, and conceived a warm affection for old Jacquot. He would often have him to the great house to question him about years gone by, and it thus came about that the pair would often spend whole hours in each other's society.

One evening, after one of these long talks with the old man, the Prince sent

for me, and on obeying his order, which I did instantly, I found his Highness suffering under strong excitement.

"Ivan Andreovitch," he asked me, "are you ready to spend some hours with me?"

"I hope to spend all my life with you, my Prince," was my answer.

"Yes, yes, of course; but I am thinking of something else just now. Are you ready to help me demolish . . . ?" But here the Prince stopped dead.

"To demolish what?" I asked him.

"To demolish, or, at any rate, break through a stone wall. Jacquot has just told me a very extraordinary story, which highly concerns our family in general and myself in particular. Look you, Ivan Andreovitch, I would know for certain whether he is telling me old wives' tales or whether he is speaking the truth. I cannot have a stranger mixed up in the affair, and still less any of my serfs, so I beg you not to refuse to do what I ask, Ivan."

I agreed on the spot, as may be supposed, and asked the Prince what the story was Jacquot had told him.

"To-morrow—you shall know to-morrow," the Prince assured me. "After all, the whole thing may only be a silly fable. I am inclined to think poor old Jacquot's dotage is beginning; he told me some things that seem altogether impossible. However, I am determined to make sure with my own eyes; so to-morrow we shall find out what to think of this most strange story. I count on your help and your discretion, Ivan."

I once more repeated my promise to the Prince to help him on the morrow in whatever way he required. This done, he proceeded to discuss with me various questions of land cultivation and tillage, the felling of timber, etc., but all the while his mind was obviously taken up with quite other matters. He did not hear a word I said to him, and his own remarks were so inconsequent I had the greatest difficulty in following his meaning.

"Well, to-morrow, then," he finally concluded, getting up and offering me his hand.

"To-morrow, no less than to-day, I shall hold myself always at your Excellency's orders."

I am ready to confess the mysterious nature of the adventure had so captivated my mind and set my imagination agog, that I did not sleep a wink all night. It

was just as well, for barely had the first rays of dawn appeared when the Prince sent a messenger to rouse me.

"Are you all ready?" were his first words on seeing me enter his study.

"Well, I am ready too; so we will be moving." And giving me the example, he descended the steps before the great door, after giving orders that no one, not even Crop-eared Jacquot, was to enter the gardens during his absence.

We traversed a great part of the park, crossed the two little bridges thrown over the artificial river, and made straight for the Pink Pavilion. Arrived there, we found in the vestibule a couple of pick-axes, a supply of wax candles, and a black wooden box of moderate dimensions—all of which articles had been brought there by the Prince himself prior to our arrival.

The Pavilion contained five or six rooms. After passing through the first three of these the Prince stopped, and, striking with the crowbar he was carrying against a solid-looking wall, said—

"This is the place."

We immediately set to work, and after an hour and a half's labour the wall offered an opening large enough to allow a man to creep through. The Prince lit two candles, and gave me one, after which we pushed our way into the room beyond, which was quite dark, and hermetically closed on every side.

The strong smell issuing from this vault-like chamber very nearly stopped me from passing the opening; but seeing his Highness go through, I felt bound to follow.

But no sooner was I inside than I felt my hair stand up on my head. It was not merely that a hideous odour of the tomb caught my breath; more than that, for there, amid the remains of some pieces of furniture, half rotted away, I beheld a human skeleton lying on the floor.

At the sight the Prince crossed himself, and said—

"Lord, have pity on this Thy servant's soul, for it may well be she died in despair."

Then, turning to me after a few moment's silence, he added—

"So the old man spoke truth after all."

"What does it mean?" I asked wildly, scarcely recovered from the violent emotion I had just experienced.

"It means the *dead sins of bygone*

years, my dear Ivan Andreovitch, that's what it means. I will tell you the whole story one day; for the moment it is beyond me. Only help me to gather all this together."

And, suiting the action to the word, he began reverently to collect the bones lying scattered at his feet, in which task I forced myself by a supreme effort of will to assist him.

We laid all that was left in the box prepared beforehand for the purpose, which the Prince carefully locked, and put the key in his pocket.

In collecting together these relics of mortality, we had found lying amongst them a pair of diamond earrings, the remains of a pearl necklace, a gold wedding-ring, some wire and vestiges of whalebone, to which still clung the half-rotten fragments of some silken material, the colour faded beyond the possibility of identification.

The Prince carefully locked up the earrings, the remains of the necklace, and the wedding-ring. Then we shouldered the box, and, utterly exhausted with our labours and the emotions we had gone through, we returned to the Castle.

"Get me fifty workmen at once," he said to the Factor of the Estate, whom we met as we crossed the Courtyard, "and let them bring their crowbars and pickaxes with them."

For my own part, I went straight to my own rooms, to wash and change my clothes. When I returned to the Prince's apartments, I failed to find him in his study, the room where he usually sat.

"Where is the Prince?" I asked his valet.

"In the Portrait Gallery," the man told me.

I followed him there, and found him standing in the middle of the vast apartment, still all covered with dust and plaster—in fact, in precisely the same state as on leaving the Pink Pavilion. He was gazing, perfectly still and silent, at a woman's portrait, the face of which, by some strange caprice of the former masters of the Castle, was completely hidden under a huge blotch of black paint.

The box containing the bones rested on the floor directly underneath this sinister-looking picture. Turning to the Prince, I saw that he was weeping silently. Presently a messenger arrived to tell him

the workmen were assembled; on which he wiped his face, which was streaming with tears, and left the Gallery, signing to me to follow him.

The Prince led the workmen to the Pink Pavilion, and pointing to the building, ordered them to destroy it to the very foundations, and convey the materials to the Church of Nishevo, which he was building at the time.

But before starting the men on their task, he resolved to enter the sepulchral chamber once more in person, to make a last inspection of anything that might still be there. It was well he did; for on one of the walls of the room, engraven on the stone with some sharp-pointed instrument, was an inscription, of which I could only make out what I copy here—

"Year 1807—the 14 October.

"Farewell, my best beloved Boris! Your own dear Varvara . . . here, by the cruelty of your . . ."

"An axe!" cried the Prince, excitedly. "Give me an axe!"

I gave him one with a trembling hand, for this name of Boris was his father's, and Varvara was his mother's.

His Highness seized the hatchet, and shivered into splinters the stone that bore the inscription, shouting at the same time to the workmen—

"Down with it! Raze it to the ground! Before to-day's sun set let there not be one stone left upon another!" And by the same evening the Pavilion was literally demolished to its very foundations.

Next morning at daybreak one of the Prince's carriages stood waiting for us at the door of the Castle, into which we climbed, carrying with us the box of bones covered like a coffin with a black cerecloth embroidered with a silver cross.

"To the Monastery of Makarieff," were the Prince's orders to the coachman.

Arrived there, we found the Monks assembled in the great Courtyard. The box was deposited in the vault of the Groubenski Princes; after which we attended a solemn service for the repose of the soul of the Princess Varvara.

The same night Prince Danilo Borisovitch, the last of the race of the Groubenski, started for St. Petersburg, taking no one with him but myself, and giving holiday and freedom to all his serfs and retainers. Three years later he died, not forgetting

in his will either myself or Crop-eared Jacquot.

Our mysterious labours and the demolition of the Pink Pavilion soon got noised abroad among the populace. As we had been seen carrying the black box out of the Pavilion, it was reported that the Prince had there discovered a chest full of gold and precious stones; and with a view to confirm this account of the matter, his Highness himself declared how Crop-eared Jacquot had informed him of a secret hiding-place, in which the old Prince Alexis had deposited sundry family jewels. Everybody congratulated the Prince in this lucky find, and as we had received orders, Jacquot and myself, to tell the same tale, everybody was firmly convinced of its authenticity.

CHAPTER II

THE PRINCE ALEXIS

OH, no! little father, (Crop-eared Jacquot confided to me one day, in the course of one of the many conversations that followed his ever-memorable intercession on behalf of the hounds,) no! in old days life was by no manner of means conducted on the same lines as nowadays. In those times a great Lord lived like a great Lord; but to-day, under the reign of our good Emperor Nicholas, —whom God preserve!—everything is grown mean and petty, and the glories of yore fall and fade away more and more every day. It is very like, the world is come to its last years, and is verging fast to its extinction. . . . Ah, I can only repeat, little father, Ivan Andreovitch, (Jacquot resumed with a deep sigh,) that when I see what goes on about me now, I am sometimes tempted to sinful murmuring and the use of wicked and impious words like these: "Why, Lord, in your anger have you deemed good to leave me yet alive among the living? It were surely time my old bones were sleeping the eternal sleep, and my eyes closed for ever, instead of shedding the bitter tears they must needs shed at sight of the things of to-day!"

All is now brought down to so mean and low a level it shames me, who have seen the great days of old. Look at my master, the Prince Danilo, for example;

he owns scarce a poor thousand souls all told, and if there are left in all the Castle thirty or forty servants at his orders, it is the most there are! Can that be counted a proper supply for a great house like ours? Yes, I know the pack is well kept up; but you know very well that but for me the poor dogs would have disappeared long ago.

Yes, the pack is left. But the musicians, and the huntsmen, and the dwarfs, and the fools, and the negroes, and the running footmen, and the mutes, where are they gone? Yet they were once upon a time adjuncts—the indispensable adjuncts, I tell you—of every house of any degree of self-respect. Well, Ivan Andreovitch, search and see, and you will not find a vestige of them, whether in my master's house or, I may safely say, in that of any Russian nobleman in the land; one and all, they live with a niggardliness that is altogether deplorable! I am ready to wager you will not find one, of the present generation, that knows how to drive a six-in-hand; they drive shabbily, the best of them, with a beggarly pair of horses, never caring if folk take them for nobodies or dirty traders!

But, after all, what is the good of horses to such-like folks? We have reached such a pitch of abomination that we harness a single horse to a carriage so small as to be next door to invisible; the lackey takes his seat side by side with his master, and calmly folding his arms, is driven by his master, who makes himself coachman to his own servant. . . . Ah, dear Ivan Andreovitch, I tell you this, and you may take my word for it, I cannot witness without feeling sick the depths of degradation into which we are fallen. We may say without fear of contradiction, there is no proper sense of dignity left now in the world, and God only knows what will be the end of it all!

Consider the state our nobles are come to! There are some positively not ashamed to engage in trade, while others have married merchants' daughters, and keep their ledgers posted with their own hands. They might just as well let their beards grow at once, and wear their trousers tucked into their boots, and the kumatch shirt over their trousers. If only they got any richer by it all, but, upon my word, they only sink deeper and deeper into debt. Every one of them owes more

than he can ever save all his life long; and as for money coming in, you may hear them grumbling every day and saying how long it takes to arrive.

Ah, but if their fathers and grandfathers and forefathers—whom God keep in His everlasting kingdom!—if only they could leave their graves, they would soon send their dear descendants to the stables,* and there, according to the fine old customs of our ancestors, give them such a sound taste of the knout and the rods they would deem it the wiser course to change their fashion of life back again.

Well, now, think of it, little father, here is our master, Danilo Borisovitch; well, he has still a thousand souls left, or thereabouts, so he could be a great lord, if he would. Well, I ask you, does he look like a great nobleman? does he act like one? He has studied at Moscow, at a University—how do they call the thing? it passes my understanding—for all the world like a shopkeeper's son, and sat there on the same benches—so they tell me, though I am bound to say I can scarce credit it—on the same benches with the shoemakers' and the tailors' lads! . . . Now, I ask you, Ivan Andreovitch, as a reasonable and sensible man, tell me in God's name, is it possible shoemakers and tailors can be fit comrades for a Prince? What has come of it? Why, he has ennobled the shoemakers and the tailors, and has learnt himself in their company the mean habits you see him practise.

When he came here first, instead of ordering a great hunt, instead of offering the nobility of the neighbourhood a magnificent banquet such as his ancestors used to give, what was the first thing he did? Why, ordered the hounds to be hanged or drowned!

I forgive him, for the order was never carried out. . . . But there! his favourite amusement is to attend the Moujiks' merrymakings, dance with the peasant girls, get the old grandads to tell him some tale of Czar Ivan the Terrible, or hum over some ancient ballad of the Cossacks or Strelitz! Is that a pastime becoming a Prince's dignity?—to say nothing of his buying up old books and old pictures at fabulous prices!

One day he set eyes on an old blind

* It was in the stables that in former days domestic executions took place in the establishments of great Russian nobles.

beggar propped up against the wall of a bazaar, and singing through his nose some silly old song in honour of St. Vladimir. Ah, Holy Apostles! the Prince, when he heard the song, just trembled with delight. He grasped the old fellow by the hand, had him up into his coach, and brought him back in state to the Castle. Arrived there, he led him straight to his own private room, seated the old scamp in a fine velvet armchair, and when he had installed him quite comfortably, gorged him with wine and brandy, made them bring him all that was best from his own table, and finally begged him—begged him! when he could have ordered him, and sent him packing to the stables if he refused—begged him to sing his old song of St. Vladimir over again. Then, convinced at last the Prince was not making game of him, the old rascal struck up his canticle with all the power of his lungs, and bellowed it out from start to finish, while the Prince took all the pains in the world to listen with his own two ears, as if it had been something downright precious! For three days—you saw it yourself, little father, for you were here at the time—for three days he lodged this dirty old beggar in the Castle; for three nights, this old mangy dog lay in a feather bed; and when he had sung all his songs, the Prince gave him twenty roubles, a complete suit of clothes, and sent him back safe to the place where he had first found him, saying joyfully and triumphantly—

"Ah! these old folk-songs; they are gold indeed, pure gold! For such treasures I would gladly give my last acre of land!"

Now tell me true, Ivan Andreovitch; is this stark, staring madness, or is it not?

And then, when he takes it into his head to have an *antiquity hunt*, as he calls it, what a to-do that is! He has all the old graves dug up for miles round. God forgive him for disturbing the dead in their last resting-place! You have seen him yourself take pickaxe in hand and set to, excavating, with a moujik working away either side of him. Then, if he comes across some old copper gewgaw or cracked earthenware pot, not fit to hold dog's meat, he jumps with joy and wraps it all up in paper, as if he had recovered the necklace or bracelet of Queen Soubika!

Nay, nay! by St. Sergius, we lived in



WE TOOK GRIPS OF ONE ANOTHER

another fashion in the good old times, little father. Then great noblemen only associated with great noblemen, and so far from filth like that blind beggar being allowed inside their palaces to loll in arm-chairs, they would never have dreamed of admitting to familiarity any one not of their own rank and fortune. Suchlike were only seen on rare occasions, and then as mere acquaintances, admitted chiefly that their host might count at his table more guests than his neighbours could ever get together. On their side, it behoved them, as the phrase went then, to tread the tight-rope warily, for let them make a slip, and they were sent packing with the whip pretty smartly! That's the way to treat such gentry. If the frost never nipped the peas, they'd grow as tall as poplars!

Hurrah! say I, for the good old times. Now take the case of the Prince Alexis. God in Heaven! what a life it was! The Castle was a perfect paradise; what wealth! what abundance! The table silver alone weighed a hundred and forty *pounds*; * and the cellars were crammed with casks full of roubles. As for copper money, it was stored in the granary like wheat, in great boxes. There were two several bands of musicians, each sixty performers strong; there were five hundred saddle and two hundred carriage horses; there were a thousand dogs, eighteen professional fools, a dozen negroes and as many mutes. The minimum total of guests was forty at the high table, without counting in the others. Our house may indeed be said to have been like a cup brim full to overflowing in those days. And the master of all this magnificence, what a great lord he was, to be sure! You might go through all the whole world nowadays with torches alight at high noon, and not come across his like. . . . Alas! alas! it is all gone, all vanished away, never to return. No, no! there are never two summers in the same year.

I should be believed when I praise the Prince Alexis, for I did not always enjoy the happiness of being in his good graces.

First of all I was kennelman in his service, and afterwards groom. I held the latter post when one day the fancy took him, after a dinner with some boon companions of his, to call me in at dessert to wrestle with his bear. Now, when Prince Alexis thought good to order you

to do a thing, there was nothing else for it but to obey.

The bear stood up on his hind legs, and we took grips of one another. I was getting on very well, and I am pretty sure, with the help of a final and decisive trip, I was going to throw the beast, when the accursed quadruped, feeling he was going to be beaten, caught my ear between his teeth and began deliberately eating it off.

"Saukinsin," said I, "will you let go? No? . . . One—will you let go? Two—will you let go? Three—will you let go? You won't? . . . Then look out!"

So saying, I took my hunting-knife from my pocket, and drove it in under the animal's arm-pit up to the handle. The bear fell stark dead, but he had my right ear well between his teeth. Seeing what had happened, the Prince Alexis, he cut off my left ear, to teach me not to kill bear again without his leave.

Since that day I have always been known as *Crop-eared Jacquot*. However, as the Prince had satisfied his momentary anger, he bore me no grudge. The bear was stuffed and set up in the antechamber, facing the trunk of a tree which he seemed to be climbing. As for me, I was some while afterwards promoted to the dignity of huntsman.

Unluckily, the first day I was in charge of the pack, I let the fox get away, and never managed to put the dogs on his scent again. The Prince was furious, and thought fit then and there to give me a fatherly correction of fifty lashes of the knout; then, on returning to the Castle, he packed me off to the stables, where another hundred was counted out to me, with the rods this time. Eventually he decided I was good for nothing better than keeping the pigs, and sent me away for this purpose to a distant estate, banishing me altogether from the Castle and its delights and privileges.

Five years later the Prince deigned to restore his goodwill to me. I will tell you how this happened.

One morning his Highness started for the chase at break of day. It was freezing, and the Volga was already skimmed over with a slight coating of ice, but so thin it could easily be broken with a kick of the heel. It was a hunt with nets, and they killed more than five hundred head, foxes and hares together.

* Something over 2½ tons.

Then a halt was called on the plateau of Niskevo, which, from a height of some twenty feet, drops almost sheer to the level of the stream. The Prince Alexis, already well pleased with the result of his day's sport, resolved to indulge in a yet more exciting diversion. To begin with, he took his seat on a cask of vodky, and first draining a great glass of the liquor himself, he graciously condescended to offer the same refreshment to all present with his own hand. After which, desiring to afford his guests a token of his good humour, he ordered his huntsmen to give an exhibition of the *rejak*, a sport little practised in these degenerate days. . . .

(So much so that I did not myself know what this *rejak* was, and asked Jacquot to enlighten me.)

Oh, it was a most entertaining amusement, (Jacquot informed me). From the top of the cliff overhanging the Volga you had to take a header into the river, break through the crust of ice forming on the surface, dive under water, and come up again at a point more or less distant.

It was the favourite diversion of the late Prince Alexis—whom God keep in His kingdom! But on this occasion it so happened there was nobody skilful enough to perform the *rejak* to his satisfaction. One man fell flat, full length to the water, and offering too large a surface, failed to pierce the ice. This performer received there and then fifteen lashes of the knout on his bare back, to teach him not to dive belly first again, when it should be head first.

Another, before ever reaching the water, broke his neck on a projecting rock; while three other imbeciles, after taking an excellent header, and smashing the ice all right from above downwards, could not succeed in breaking it from underneath upwards, and stayed below to mount guard among the fishes.

Thereupon the Prince flew into a violent passion, and seized his whip, shouting—

"Scoundrels! is that the way you make sport for me? Well, I'm going to beat you, one and all, till death puts an end to your sufferings."

But he thought better of this; and seeing he could not get his grooms and squires to do the feat properly, he turned to the petty nobles who were his henchmen and boon companions.

"Come," he cried, "have a try, you

there, and show these fellows that gentlemen are better divers than any moujiks."

But they did worse still. Only one succeeded in breaking the ice properly, and dived in head first; but once under the ice, fearing, no doubt, he would be made to repeat the performance, he played the Prince the mean trick of staying there for good and all.

At this, the good Prince Alexis felt all his anger turned to shame, and bursting into tears like a child, he cried—

"Truly, I think my last days are approaching, seeing I have not a single man left with me brave enough and skilful enough to execute the *rejak* as it should be done. You are a parcel of old women, every one of you! . . . Ah!" he added, "Crop-eared Jacquot, my poor lad, where are you—where are you this day?"

Then, turning towards those about him—

"Yes, there was a brave lad," he said, "who could do the *rejak* as often as three times running. Where is he? Where is he, I say? Bring him here!"

Then they timidly approached the Prince and told him—

"But, little father Alexis, do you not remember you thought good to banish him, because he had displeased your Highness?"

"If he had spat upon my mother's grave I would have him back," cried the Prince, "and forgive him freely."

At this, two or three men jumped on horseback and dashed off at a hand gallop to fetch me. I mounted one of their horses, and a quarter of an hour after was by the Prince's side.

If I had suffered it, I verily believe my good, noble master would have kissed my cheek. He was for explaining the matter to me; but as there was no time to lose, seeing how the frost was increasing, and the ice thickening at the rate of a line a minute, I cried, "I understand, my Prince, I understand!" and throwing myself from the top of the cliff, broke the ice with my head, and rose to the surface again twenty paces further on.

In less than a quarter of an hour I had repeated the same feat three times over, to the vast satisfaction of the Prince and the vast astonishment of the spectators.

I wanted to do it a fourth time, though my head was already streaming with blood; but the Prince shouted to me—



THROWING MYSELF FROM THE TOP OF THE CLIFF. BROKE THE ICE WITH MY HEAD

"Well done! well done! Enough for to-day. I restore you to my favour, and hereby appoint you Head Kennelman of the Hounds."

More than that, he graciously presented me with five and twenty roubles on the spot, bade me accompany him whenever he went a-hunting, and gave me a suit of his livery. Some while after he named me Head Pricker of all his dogs, and married me to a lady's-maid whom, in a moment of lightheartedness, he had honoured with his favours.

From that time I was always in his good graces, and may boast to have been his favourite and most confidential servant.

Next year, the grace of God suffered me to do our late Prince a great service, which completed the excellent footing on which I stood.

Twenty versts from Niskevo, on the farther side of the forest of Undol, lies the village of Zabor, in which village there resided at that date a man called Solmime, a Corporal on half-pay. He had been honourably discharged from service on account of increasing age and sundry wounds he had received in the year 1799 when serving under Suvarof.

So he lived in the village of Zabor along with his young wife, whom he had brought from Lithuania, and who was so beautiful a woman it was said that in all Russia, great or little, her match was not to be found.

Well, seeing the good Prince Alexis was as keen a connoisseur of women as he was of dogs and horses, it was but natural that Corporal Solmime's wife should have attracted his august attention.

First of all he wanted—for he was a nobleman of much gentleness and courtesy, was the late Prince—he wanted in the first instance to get her to the Castle of Groubenski on some open and honourable pretext. But the woman refused point blank, and as for the man, why, he lost his temper, and swore, either he would go and complain to our little father the Emperor of the insult intended him, or take the still shorter course of killing the Prince with his own hands.

One day—it was in summer-time, I remember—we went hunting in the forest of Undol, and after killing a dozen foxes we called a halt not far from Zabor.

The Prince was sad, and sat apart by

himself. Neither the sight of our spoil lying on the turf, nor the five or six glasses of vodky his Highness condescended to drink, availed to distract him from the melancholy thoughts that possessed him. He fixed such burning eyes on the village of Zabor, you might have supposed he wanted to set it afire.

"What care I for your game?" he exclaimed at last, turning towards the rest of us. "'Tis another sort of game I would fain hunt down. . . . Ah! what would I not give the man who should bring me the pretty fawn that lurks in the village yonder!" And with a despairing gesture the poor Prince pointed towards Zabor.

No sooner did I hear him express this desire than I sprang to horse and drove my spurs in with a will. Arrived at Solmime's, I caught sight over a hedge of his wife, who was in her garden plucking raspberries. To clear the hedge at a bound, seize the fair lady round the body and swing her in front of me on the saddle, was the work of an instant. I galloped as hard as I could go to where I had left the Prince, and deposited at his feet the woman he thought fit to sigh for.

"And now," I cried, "may your Highness have a merry heart," for I was most anxious to shew him I was a truly devoted servant.

Suddenly we see the husband tearing up, so furious and so blinded with rage he came near trampling the Prince under his horse's hoofs. I cannot tell you exactly how things happened then; I only remember it was a hot few minutes, and that at the end of it the Corporal was a dead man. As for the fair Lithuanian, she lived thenceforth at Groubenski, in a retired pavilion, which she only quitted, three years later, to be shorn of her pretty hair, and enter the Convent of Zimorag as a nun. The Prince Alexis, who was always open-handed, endowed the House magnificently, had a new Church built, and gave the foundation a hundred acres of land as a free-will offering.

She was a real good woman, the little Lithuanian. The Lord give her her part in the kingdom of heaven! As long as she lived at the Castle, she could always soothe the Prince's savage humours. Whenever she saw him getting enraged with one of his moujiks, she had the trick of interposing in the nick of time, and so effectually that she saved more than one poor wretch from the bastinado

he had earned. So, when she came to die, there were many folks prayed for the welfare of her soul.

It was I who brought the news of her end to the Prince; and he would most certainly have been deeply touched, if I had not had to tell him at the same time of the death of Arabka, his favourite bitch.

It was the second time I had seen his Highness the Prince in tears.

"Ah, my poor Arabka!" he said. "I could tell her voice among the baying of a thousand dogs; and if she howled in the night, you remember how I used to wake you up, my poor Jacquot, and tell you—'Jacquot, Arabka is crying; go see if she wants anything, the poor dear little beast.'" And it was quite true; such was his kindly custom.

Well, the Prince buried Arabka like a Christian; compelled the parish priest, willy-nilly, to say the prayers for the dead over her, and built her a fine monument, the ruins of which you may see to this day in the park.

CHAPTER III

THE FAIR OF MAKARIEFF

YOU must know, my dear Ivan Andreovitch, (resumed Crop-eared Jacquot,) that there used formerly to be held at Makarieff a magnificent Fair, which subsequently, by the good pleasure of our father the Czar, was transferred to Nijni-Novgorod. To this Fair resorted not only the folk of the neighbouring districts, but likewise merchants from other lands, and even from the most remote quarters of the world. The Chinese came with their teas; the Calmucks and Tartars with their cattle; the Persians with their carpets and turquoises. Thus at the height of the Fair as many as three or four hundred thousand men would be assembled at Makarieff.

To keep order, there came from Nijni and Kasan, and even Saratoff, commissaries of police, with regiments of dragoons; but the chief authority and the disposal of all these forces rested in the hands of Prince Alexis.

The Fair always opened on the ninth Friday after Pentecost. From early

morning all was as busy as an ant-hill, and everybody appeared dressed in holiday attire, powdered, and either on horseback or driving. When all was ready, a Deputy Intendant would appear—the office was generally entrusted to some petty noble who had lost his fortune—and immediately betake himself to the Prince's quarters to advise him the time was come to open the Fair. Then the Prince would order us to take our places in line, and, on being informed we were all awaiting his orders, he would come forward to the head of the main steps in gala dress—scarlet coat with gold embroideries, waistcoat of frosted brocade with silver buttons, powdered wig, three-cornered hat, knee-breeches, and sword. He was accompanied, besides us retainers, by a hundred or more petty nobles, his acquaintance, and pages, all wearing silk coats and wigs. The Princess Marfa Petrovna in a gown *à la Pompadour*, richly embroidered in silver and trimmed with crimson, her neck and shoulders literally covered with jewels, also showed herself in the same place, attended by her women, all in silk, and wearing powder, together with her "Dames in Residence," dressed out like princesses.

And here I should tell you what these Dames in Residence were, viz. a selection of the handsomest girls among the Prince's serfs, forming just as truly a harem for his enjoyment as ever the Grand Turk had. From the moment a peasant's daughter had been the Prince's mistress, her future was secure. She received a dowry of a thousand roubles, to enable her either to marry one of us or to enter a Nunnery, whichever she pleased. If she preferred to stay on at the Castle with her companions, she might do so; only in that case she was liable to the surveillance of two old harridans, named respectively Vasilika and Ouliachka. For looks, they were two as ugly old women as you would wish to see; but for bodily strength, sturdy wenches, fit to fight the most stalwart of us all. Whenever it was a question of administering corrections in the harem, they could be trusted to strike hard, laying on the lash with all the spite the old and ugly invariably feel for the young and beautiful.

Behind the "Dames in Residence" stood the maid-servants, dressed in jackets embroidered in gold, and wearing little round caps of sable.

"March!" the Prince would cry, and the procession would move off.

Fifty horsemen headed the line; their costume consisted of a tunic of red cloth, sky-blue riding-breeches with silver stripe and silver girdle, yellow boots, powdered wig, and yellow cap with a red feather to match the red of the tunics.

Behind the horsemen came the several companies of huntsmen, prickers, outriders and kennelmen. Each company was subdivided into three squadrons—the first dressed in red coats and mounted on brown horses, the second in green coats and riding bays, the third in blue coats on greys.

Next came the grooms in raspberry-coloured coats, with yellow jockey-caps and feathers of the same shade as the coats, wearing gold scarves with a silver horn embroidered on them.

Lastly, after the grooms, marched the neighbouring gentry and petty nobles of the Prince's acquaintance, mounted on the Prince's horses, each dressed according to his own means and taste, but always as richly as possible.

Then, after an interval, came the Prince Alexis himself, riding in a gilt coach drawn by six white horses with tails and manes dyed black. Behind the coach were six *heyducs*, while six running footmen followed on foot, wearing plumed hats, white breeches, and satin shoes, and carrying silver wands.

Then came the negroes in long coats of dark red satin and gold belts, with a silver chain round their necks and red caps on their heads.

After these, the Princess Marfa rode in another coach, every bit as rich as the first, and drawn by as fine horses as the Prince's own. All about her carriage ran a dozen foot-pages, in red and gold tunics, all the rest of their dress being white and silver; they wore huge powdered wigs, and held their hats in their hands, as they would not go on their heads.

The Princess was followed by forty coaches, each with four horses, and containing the Princess's attendant women; and behind each carriage were two footmen in yellow liveries.

Arrived at the river-bank, the whole cavalcade embarked on ferry-barges specially provided beforehand, and lined with red velvet, on which the horses pranced as if they were treading turf, and the carriages rolled as smoothly as on a paved

highway. Presently the further bank was reached, and all made for the Monastery, where Mass was sung, a procession marched round the Church, and the Priests then sought the scene of the Fair, to bless the banners of the different Guilds. With his own hands the Prince used to present the Town banner to the Archimandrite; the music played "The Glory of the Lord of Sion;" the musketry rattled, and the big guns thundered. The Archimandrite sprinkled a few drops of holy water over the banner, the Prince hauled it up to the top of the pole; and then, amid salvos of artillery and volleys of musketry, rose a mighty hurrah from three hundred thousand voices.

The meaning of all this noise was to announce that the Fair was now open, and any one might henceforth freely buy and sell. If any merchant had been so ill-advised as to open his stall before this recognised and solemn signal, the Prince Alexis would have soon seen to it he had a sound thrashing, and all his goods thrown into the river or burnt.

The Prince then betook himself with his followers to the Archimandrite's residence, where he was always invited to dine. Meantime the populace of Makarieff and the surrounding villages crowded to a vast raised space bordering on the Fair-ground, on which tables were set out for a feast.

In fact, the Prince signalled the day by a free banquet to five or six thousand guests. Three hundred casks of wine and a hundred breakers of brandy were put at the people's disposition, and the only orders given them were to eat and drink their fill. Indeed, so well were these directions carried out, that it was counted a poor year when less than fifty drunkards were left dead on the ground. That day no man had any right to disturb a drunken man, no matter what spot he might have chosen to sleep off his potations in. If he lay right across the road, blocking the carriage-way, you were bound to drive round him at the risk of upsetting in the ditch, while foot passengers merely stepped over the prostrate form of this good son of Noah. But no man must touch him so much as with the tip of his little finger; the prohibition applied to each and all, be his rank what it might, and the Prince gave the good example of being the first and foremost to respect it.

The next day the Prince gave a fine entertainment at the Castle of Groubenski, to which he invited all the great nobles of the vicinity, who each came attended by a numerous following—as well as the chief merchants and notables of Makarieff.

In bad years the number of persons invited to this *fête* would be between a thousand and fifteen hundred; in good years I have known it rise to three thousand.

It was on the lawn behind the Castle that the tables were spread for the smaller fry, much after the model of the people's banquet of the day before. There was the same lavish provision of meat and drink, and you could scarce hear yourself speak for the music and singing and banging of guns. After nightfall there was dancing everywhere by torchlight; all the women and girls that could be found in the Fair and its purlieus were brought to the ball, and you may well suppose, poor human flesh being what it is, it was a hard matter to come out of such a merry-making without having been guilty of some wickedness, greater or less. When the fireworks were over, the Prince retired with some of his special cronies to the garden pavilions, while the rest of us kept it up outside till daybreak.

As long as the Fair lasted—for six weeks, that is to say—there was an unbroken series of *fêtes* and merry-makings.

To assure himself with his own eyes that all was going well and orderly, the Prince Alexis condescended to visit the Fair-ground in person every day; and woe to such as were found in fault—punishment was not long in overtaking them. The Prince was a man who hated all protracted proceedings: no sooner was complaint laid than an inquiry was held; no sooner was the inquiry completed than judgment was delivered. No need of tedious pleadings and a lot of papers with him, and for this reason the merchants one and all professed the greatest admiration for him, calling him their *little father* and their *benefactor*. They entertained as little love as he did for papers and legal documents, and the Prince's vigorous and summary justice pleased them well, both because it saved precious time—particularly precious in Fair-time—and because it rescued them from the clutches of Commissaries, Attorneys, and suchlike limbs of the law. They were

well convinced of one thing, these worthy traders, and that was, that if they once got mixed up with the lawyers, not only their profits realised at the Fair would change hands, but that even their previous savings would soon vanish from the leathern bag where they were ensconced.

The fashion in which the Prince administered justice was extremely simple. He had the delinquent brought before him, and the delinquency once proved, the offender, whether nobleman, merchant, or moujik, was treated with the same impartiality. The Prince began by admonishing him, and in doing so spared neither oaths nor insults; he even condescended on occasion to second the admonition with a good cuff on either ear or a sufficient number of lashes of his whip laid on with his own hand. After that, he sent the culprit off to the stables, where he had a more or less considerable tale of blows of horsewhip or scourge duly counted out to him, the severity of the punishment being in no wise modified by rank or quality, but depending solely on the nature of the offence. When all was over, the man had to present himself once more before the Prince, to thank him for his goodness, the trouble he had taken, and the paternal solicitude he had shown. Then the Prince would make him a little speech appropriate to the circumstances, give him his hand to kiss, and order meat and drink to be set before him; and so the matter would end.

The merchants admitted to the Fair were expressly charged to sell as dear as ever they could to the rich, and cajole them in every way, both in quality, weight and measure of the commodities they purchased; but, on the other hand, to do no sort of wrong or injury to the poor.

On one occasion the Prince invited to the Castle to dinner a merchant from Moscow who was in the habit of making a profit of five or six thousand roubles at every Fair, his dealings being chiefly in silk goods and mercery of all sorts.

Dinner ended, and Prince and merchant sitting at the board, coffee-cup in hand, the following dialogue took place:—

“What price do you sell your scarlet Levant silk at, Trifon Egoritch, eh?”

“At one *grivne* four *allines*, your Excellency,” replied the trader; “it is the best quality in the market.”

“It was at your stall the wife of the

Pope Athanasius bought some yesterday?"

"Very likely, your Lordship; but I really cannot remember for certain. I have so many customers in a day, it is impossible to remember them all."

"I tell you the Pope's wife bought an *archine* of Levant silk from you yesterday. What price did she have it at?"

"I don't remember now, Excellency. Besides, very possibly she bought the silk at my shop without its having been I who served her. It may have been one of my salesmen."

"Call me a messenger," was the Prince's only answer.

I should have told you, my dear Ivan Andreovitch, that there were always stationed at the Great Steps a dozen mounted messengers, standing by their horses, which were saddled and bridled, so as to be ready to start anywhere the instant they received the Prince's orders.

One of these entered the dining-hall. The merchant was terrified, thinking he was to be led off to the stables; but he was mistaken. Prince Alexis thus instructed the messenger—

"You will accompany this merchant to his stall at the Fair, where he will hand you a remnant of his best levantine. Then you will go straight to Pope Athanasius' house, ask to see his wife Visigha, and say, 'Little mother, here is a nice remnant of levantine which the merchant Trifon Egoritch Tchourine, of Moscow, sends you. He sold you some over dear yesterday, and begs you, of his own motion, to accept this as a compensation.' For you, Trifon Egoritch Tchourine, you will do well, sirrah, to look better after your clerks for the future, and see they don't harry poor folks again; otherwise, I shall have to take you in hand. Enough said for this time, but be careful, be very careful! I shall keep my eye on you, and if it happen again, I will be your clerk, and attend to the sale of your goods myself."

A week had barely passed ere the Prince was informed that Tchourine had given a poor peasant short measure in a piece of dimity.

He had a horse brought round, and started for the Fair without a moment's delay.

"So, Trifon Egoritch," he said to the merchant, "you have forgotten my advice to you, it would seem. You have a bad

memory, my man; luckily I have a good one. You know what was agreed upon? I have come to take my place as your salesman. . . . You others, there, who are so knowing in *archines*, begone, and be quick about it! From this moment I am merchant and clerk in one."

Tchourine knew the Prince was not a man to play with, and left his shop instanter, followed by all his assistants in a body.

The Prince Alexis then proceeded to take his stand behind the counter, crying out in his loudest tones—

"Ho! all honest folk and good buyers, we pray and beseech you to honour our shop with your custom. We have articles to suit all tastes—magnificent satins, English dimities, China nankeens; we have every kind of ladies' goods—stockings, shawls, French muslins. Only say what you want, and we will sell it you at a fair price and good measure. We sell our merchandise for cash; but if so be anybody has no money, we will give credit. If he pay us later on, so much the better; but if he should forget to pay, we will never trouble him."

You will readily understand, little father, that on hearing such an announcement, everybody hurried to the Prince's stall. The latter, standing behind his counter, was ready to face all and sundry, and though he never gave four *archines* instead of five, he not unfrequently gave five instead of four. At this rate, in three hours' time he had sold every single thing Tchourine's establishment contained. The only objection was that ready money was very far from plentiful, for the cash customers were in a small minority compared with those who bought on credit.

When all was finished, the Prince sent for Tchourine.

"Well, here is your shop for you," said he. "I return it to you clean and nicely swept out. In this drawer here is the cash, and this ledger contains the names and addresses of customers who have bought on credit. It is your business to get in the money as quick as you can. I only hope you will always remember the Priest's wife and the peasant and his dimity. Now come and dine with me at the Castle, though, properly speaking, it is you should have invited me; you owe me a good treat for managing your business so well, and selling off your goods

for you quicker than any other man in the Fair. But I won't be exacting, and *I'm* going to regale *you* this time. So come along with me."

Tchourine was in no pressing hurry to obey, and showed evident signs of perturbation.

"Oh, never be afraid, Master," said the Prince Alexis. "You may come in perfect security. You must see that, if I did want to give you a taste of the knout, I could do it here just as easily as at Niskevo. You can come without the least apprehension."

There was no resisting such plain orders. So, reassured by the Prince's words, Tchourine took his seat by the great man's side in the coach.

At dinner Tchourine was given the place of honour, and throughout the meal the Prince stood behind the merchant's chair, handing him the best tit-bits, filling his glass with the best wines, and addressing him as *Master* without more ado. Nor was this all; for on taking leave of his host, the merchant received a present that testified his highest goodwill—nothing less than a pair of pups, a dog and a bitch, of the stock of the much-lamented Arabka.

But from that day forth Tchourine was never seen again, either at the Castle or at Makarieff, and next year it was reported in explanation of his absence that the ruinous sale he had made of his merchandise at the last Fair had so embarrassed his finances, that he was never like to recover himself again.

The Prince Alexis was always well disposed to men who dealt boldly and frankly with him. Once he was walking through the Fair, unattended and unobtrusively attired, when he encountered a merchant who had disobeyed his orders by opening his shop on a different site from the one assigned him. The meeting took place in a retired spot, behind the line of stalls, on a wide sandy plain, beyond which lay a small lake, the bottom of which was very level and the shores sloping and gradual.

The Prince saw, and instantly recognised the delinquent, a great strapping fellow of twenty-five to thirty, and a head taller than his adversary.

"Come here, my fine fellow," the Prince called out to him.

But the trader, knowing his precious skin was in peril, never budged, but

stopping where he was, forty paces or so from the other, shouted back—

"D'ye take me for a fool, little father? I know what you want with me, and I assure you I haven't the smallest wish in the world to make the acquaintance of your stick."

"You shopkeeping varlet," cried the Prince, "is that the way you obey my orders?" and he dashed for the merchant, brandishing his stick in the air.

The fellow saw very plainly his back was in imminent peril—the more so as the Prince was by this time boiling with rage. So he wasted no time waiting for his assailant, but bolted as hard as his legs would carry him for the lake. The loose sand hindered him sadly in his flight; but then it hindered his pursuer just as much. Both sank up to their ankles in it. Presently the merchant, guessing the Prince, who was older and less active than himself, must be some way behind by this time, looks round, and finds, as he expected, that he has gained considerably. "Good!" he says to himself, "I have just time;" and so saying, sits down and rapidly takes off his boots, so as to be less hampered in running. Then, bootless and unembarrassed, he darts away towards the lake, going faster than ever. The Prince Alexis takes it all in, and considers the little shopkeeper has acted very wisely. Accordingly *he* squats himself down too, and kicks off *his* boots before continuing the race. The merchant is still heading for the lake, the Prince in close pursuit. The first dashes into the water, the other unhesitatingly follows his example. The merchant halts presently, with the water up to his neck; but inasmuch as the Prince is a head shorter than the trader, when the latter is only in up to the armpits, the former has his mouth only just above water. Both are forced to stop, but there is still a good twenty feet between them.

Thus, unable to advance a step further, the Prince begins shouting at the merchant once more.

"Come here, you rascal," he cries; "I have a score to settle with you."

"No, no, little father, I'm not such a fool," is the trader's only reply. "I'm no ways very anxious to settle my score with you; it's you that want to arrange matters with me. You come here to me; for I tell you I'm not going to budge."

"So, then, you want to drown me, do

you, you coward?" cried the exasperated nobleman.

"I have no lights as to what the good God has resolved on that point; but this I do know, I shall not come to you."

And so they went on wrangling for a good half-hour, without either one or the other budging an inch. And as the water was pretty cold, for all the summer weather, both soon started shivering from head to foot.

"Come, now; you are a brave lad," said the Prince at last, "and I like brave fellows like you, particularly as I don't often come across them. I will forgive your little peccadillos; come along to the Castle. I ask you to dinner."

"Now you're lying, little father; it's not a dinner I'm to get up there, but a thrashing."

"I will not lay a finger on you, I give you my word of honour."

"No, but you'll get other people to; we all know that."

"No, I won't, upon my word as a man of honour!"

"Well, then, make the sign of the cross."

So the Prince, up to his armpits in the water as he was, signed himself several times over, swearing each time he did so by his Patron Saint he would play no trick whatever on the wily trader.

Entirely reassured by these oaths and gestures, the shopkeeper at last consented to come out. The Prince promptly followed suit; and the pair betook themselves to the Castle on the best of terms with one another. There the Prince changed his clothes and made his guest do likewise, giving him the necessary garments from his own wardrobe.

"I am positive you would have drowned me, if I had been fool enough to go after you any further," the Prince used invariably to observe to Konone Fadeitch, —such was the merchant's name—when-ever he encountered him in after days.

"I really don't know, your Highness," the latter would as invariably answer; "I should have done whatever God told me to do."

He was a cunning, a very cunning rascal, was Konone Fadeitch.

The Prince was in the habit of going to sleep, in summer time, in an armchair after his dessert. To this end he used to have his seat moved to the doorway

opening upon the balcony. All the while the Prince's siesta lasted, every one was bound to observe the strictest silence—an obligation extending not only to the inhabitants of the Castle itself, but also to all persons going up or down the Volga in their boats. Or—a visit to the stables!

Moreover, that all might be warned the Prince was condescending to enjoy the sweets of repose, a sky-blue flag, specially provided for the purpose, was hoisted on the Castle tower.

One day when he was sleeping thus, he was suddenly awakened by a voice singing right under his very balcony—the voice, in fact, of a certain petty noble, who had actually so far forgotten himself as to transgress the orders given.

He had some excuse, indeed, for while passing the lodgings of the Dames in Residence, he had been so excited by the ogings and enticing gestures of these young women, who knew from the blue flag that the Prince was fast asleep, that he had completely lost his head, and started singing at the top of his voice—

"A little footpath across the fields . . ."

But this was an excuse, as you will readily allow, he could not very well plead in mitigation of the Prince's resentment.

Directly he realised the delinquency he had been guilty of, the culprit accordingly took his heels.

"Who was that singing 'The Little Footpath'?" asked the Prince, starting up.

The domestics to whom the question was addressed instantly dispersed in all directions in pursuit of the delinquent, trying their best to find and seize him.

Luckily this latter in his flight had stumbled upon a haystack, had hastily dug out a hole and crept in, like a rabbit into its burrow, and this without anybody seeing him save and except the young ladies aforesaid; and there was no danger of their betraying the secret of a poor fellow who had got into trouble all on their account.

"Who was it singing 'The Little Footpath,' eh?" cried the Prince, for the second time in a peremptory tone; and you could hear the smashing of furniture and breaking of glass accompanying the words.

The men-servants were running all the while this way and that, as if the devil had been at their heels, but without finding a trace of the delinquent.

"Who was it singing that song?" bawled the Prince a third time in a voice of thunder, appearing at the head of the Great Steps whip in hand.

No one could tell him. The whole household was hunting and searching, questioning each other, and asking again and again in every tone of menace and consternation, "Who was it? Who was it singing 'The Little Footpath'?"

"I must have the scoundrel now, this instant," thundered the Prince, "or your backs, every one of you, shall answer for his noisy tongue!"

More hunting, more searching, without the very smallest result, the Prince all the time roaring and growling like a bear at bay, and swearing fit to split the rocks of the grotto and the cascade in the gardens.

Then the Chief Heyduc, knowing his own back was in more especial danger than anybody else's—for whenever such-like summary executions took place, having as their object the discovery of an unknown delinquent, the Prince always corrected the head men with his own hands, and never failed to put in his thirty lashes—the Chief Heyduc, I say, appealed to Vasko, the singer, and besought him to take the blame on himself.

But Vasko, perfectly well aware what his fate would be, refused point-blank.

Then they all begged and prayed him, with tears in their eyes, and the Intendant promised him all sorts of presents, to say nothing of a *douceur* of ten silver roubles.

Vasko grew pensive, winked his eye and scratched his ear; ten silver roubles was a good round sum in those days. On the other hand, his poor back ran terrible risks, for the Prince was desperately angry—there was no doubt about that.

"Well, well," he cried at last, tempted by the sight of the ten silver roubles, "I agree. Only, look here, all of you; supposing the Prince does not chastise me with his own hand, you won't hit over and above hard now, will you?" And this they promised unanimously.

Meantime the Prince had worked himself up into a very paroxysm of rage.

"All these beggarly moujiks," he belowered, "are to get a thousand lashes; friends of the house five hundred; and for the Dames in Residence—just send Ouliachka and Vasilika to me . . ."

At this the consternation was universal; not a soul dared utter one single

word, or hardly so much as breathe, indeed.

"Go, bring me every whip there is in the Castle!" roared the Prince.

"Here comes the culprit; they've got him now. Hurrah! hurrah!" cried the rabble of servants, catching sight of the Intendant and a number of heyducs bringing in Vasko, bound hand and foot.

The Prince took his seat on a divan to deliver judgment. Vasko was led before him, and all awaited anxiously the result of this terrible scene.

"So it was you singing?" asked the Prince.

"Yes, your Highness!" stammered Vasko.

The Prince sat silent some moments, frowning fiercely.

"You have a fine voice of your own!" he said at last. "Count the fellow out ten roubles, and give him a new coat."

Yes; that is what the Prince Alexis was like—as good and sweet as good white bread. Only, he loved discipline, and would have his regulations properly observed.

CHAPTER IV

PRINCE ALEXIS' BIRTHDAY

THE birthday of our dear little father, the Prince Alexis, fell five days after the Festival of the Intercession of the Holy Mother of God, and the good Prince was fain the day should be celebrated with the utmost pomp and magnificence, and it was invariably the occasion of a superb series of balls and entertainments. The guests always began to arrive at the Castle a fortnight or three weeks before the day. Among the chief of these were to be found first the great nobles of the neighbourhood, then the Imperial Governor of Kasan, the governors of contiguous provinces, the General of Dragoons in garrison at Nijni. There were some who came from as far off as Moscow, or even St. Petersburg itself, for Prince Alexis' friends, one and all, were delighted to compliment him with their presence on his *fête* day.

Each guest of importance had a room to himself in the Castle, the particular room assigned depending on the rank and circumstances of its intended occupier.

The Governor was given a pavilion to himself, and the General another.

For the petty nobles, who always attended the festival twelve or fifteen hundred strong, these were accommodated some in outbuildings, some in the moujiks' quarters, where they slept on the floor or atop of the stoves.

On the eve of the great day there was a religious service in the evening, and after that a dinner, but it was a very Lenten affair. The Prince wished to avoid, both for himself and his guests, all temptation to commit during the night any sin that could tarnish the solemnity of the next day, and prevent everybody's being up and about at an early hour.

Next morning all paid their respects to the Prince, and congratulated him, as he sat in gala costume in the great Hall of Honour, with the Governor on his right and the Princess Marfa Petrovna on his left.

The rest of the company were accommodated with seats according to their respective rank, while the petty nobles stood in the background, and the servants to a man crowded about the doors.

Then appeared upon the scene the poet the Prince kept solely and specially for ceremonials of the kind being celebrated that day. His name was Semione Tetitch, the son of a Parish Pope, who had been sent to Moscow on purpose to learn the trade of verse-making.

The poet was lodged and fed in a separate dwelling, where he spent an easy and a quiet life; his only occupation was to write a copy of verses or a pastoral whenever any special solemnity was toward at the Castle. On the present occasion he used to be shut up for three weeks beforehand in the pigeon-house, to prevent his labours being interrupted, and above all to keep him from getting drunk.

Tetitch, then, wearing a brand new silk coat and a powdered wig, would halt in the middle of the assembled company, and after a deep bow would solemnly uphold his manuscript and read out the verses he had composed, which everybody listened to in awestruck silence. This done, he would step up to the Prince, drop on one knee before him, and present him with the precious paper. Then the Prince, in token of his satisfaction, used to give him his hand to kiss, make him a present of money, and then order him to

be provided with meat and drink at discretion, never omitting to charge the attendants to keep a sharp eye on him, to see he did not die under the effects of his own intemperance. For this would have been a sad loss indeed, seeing it would have taken as much as six or eight years very likely to educate another poet laureate of the same calibre.

Moreover, general orders had been given that no one was to hurt the court poet under any circumstances. Yet in spite of this injunction, one day a certain petty noble, a hanger-on of the Prince Alexis, was tempted to play a practical joke on poor Tetitch. Coming upon the poet lying fast asleep after a drinking bout, at the very moment he had just caught a hedgehog, he popped the creature between the poet's shirt and his bare skin. The latter, suddenly awakened by a violent pain, and utterly unable in his fuddled condition to guess the reason, started running like a madman straight up to the Castle, bellowing out with all the power of his lungs—

"Police! thieves! murder!"

As ill-luck would have it, he ran right into the Prince's arms, and his Highness, on learning why the unfortunate poet was kicking up such a disturbance, condescended to laugh heartily at the trick they had played him. But all the same, after having a sound whipping administered to the delinquent nobleman, he gave orders that this latter should carry for a whole day the self-same hedgehog in the same place, to wit, between shirt and skin.

But to return to the birthday festivities. After Tetitch had taken his departure, tea was served, but only to the grand people, for in old days tea was still a very rare treat, to which the rich and great alone were accustomed. The petty nobles would not so much as have known how to set about preparing the beverage and drinking it.

Then, after the tea was drunk, the fools were introduced, who hastened to show a thousand antics and tricks of their trade. Only when everybody had laughed his fill, and the company was tired of their buffooneries, they would kick them out without further ceremony—which showed the different footing they were on from that of the poet.

When dinner was announced, all made their way to the great dining-hall, each

taking proper precedence according to his rank. One end of the table was occupied by our little mother Marfa Petrovna and the ladies, the other by our little father Alexis and the lords. Three several times in the course of the meal they drank the Prince's health, and each time all present uttered deafening hurrahs, cannon thundered, a choir of singers raised a hymn of felicitation, dwarfs grimaced, negroes danced, and guests broke with a crash whatever chinaware or glass they could lay hands on—all by way of wishing the amphitryon of the feast a long and happy life. This, too, was the moment when the Prince's favourite bear, the successor of the one that had eaten up my ear for me, would spring up, excited by the din, get on his hind legs, and start a dance, in which he very certainly displayed more grace, skill, and agility than three-quarters of the company could have done, half stupid as these were with the heavy potatoes they had indulged in.

At seven o'clock began the ball, opened with a polonaise which the Princess Marfa danced with the Governor of Kasan.

At ten o'clock the ball was interrupted to make way for the Pastoral. Everybody proceeded to the Great Gallery, while to drown more or less the noise made by so many people hurrying from one apartment to the other, the musicians struck up a series of Italian morceaux.

When the spectators were all seated, the curtain rose, and the heroine made her appearance, entering from behind a tree. More often than not, whilst she was still young, that is to say, this was Douniaka, daughter of Egor the weaver, the best-reputed beauty not at Makarieff only, but for twenty leagues round. Her hair, raised high behind, was powdered and bedecked with flowers, whilst her charming face was rendered more seductive still by two or three patches artistically disposed. She wore a magnificent gown of blue satin, and held in one hand a shepherd's crook tied with pink ribbons.

After bowing to the audience collectively, she would advance towards the Prince and recite him a second poem of compliment and congratulation, also the composition of Semione Tetitch.

When Douniaka had finished her recitation, her comrade Paraka would come on, dressed as a shepherd lad in jacket, waistcoat, and breeches of satin, and with

powdered hair. Then followed a metrical dialogue, treating at length of love and sheep, after which shepherd and shepherdess sat down side by side and fondled one another in so tender and amorous a fashion that the old men even trembled with delight, while younger people were like to faint with pleasure.

Tetitch had experienced the utmost difficulty at first in teaching the two young women to say their verses properly. As neither could read, and both were extremely lazy girls, they declared they could not understand a word of the poetry they had to learn, and could not therefore be expected to remember it. But at this the Prince Alexis had sent for Vasilika and Ouliachka. The two Furies had promptly appeared on the scene, each armed with a good birch rod, promptly tucked up the skirts of the two rebels, who next morning, as if a miracle had been performed, knew their parts so pat as never once to want the prompter's help.

Everybody was always highly delighted with the Pastoral, and Prince Alexis would seize the opportunity to call in Tetitch to be complimented as he deserved. But unfortunately, as a rule, Tetitch was by that time in no state to appear before the Prince, being engaged in sleeping off the effects of his self-indulgence. However, this in no wise prevented him from supplying every year a first-rate Pastoral. God give him a place in His kingdom!

At one o'clock supper was served, at which meal the number of dishes barely exceeded sixty, because, as the Prince said very truly, it is not wholesome to eat at night. But to put the balance square, wines and cordials were provided in the utmost profusion. Every one was bound to empty his glass the instant it was filled, or else his Highness had the liquor, whatever it was, poured over the head and over the clothes of all who did not drink in a becoming manner.

After supper was over, all were at liberty to go where they pleased. The Prince Alexis himself, accompanied by fifteen or twenty of his bosom friends, would retire to one of the garden pavilions. Arrived there, the first thing done was to get rid of all superfluous clothing; then the Prince had a great gold goblet of Cyprus wine filled to the brim, which he first drained himself and afterward

passed round to each of his bosom companions.

Finally, when the last of the Prince's friends had emptied the goblet, his Highness would cry—

"Now open the doors, and let the denizens of Olympus come down to us mortals."

At the word a score of the Dames in Residence would flock in, all dressed in costumes of the Heathen Goddesses, from the Nine Muses to the Three Graces, and all resplendent in their youth and beauty.

Then followed dances and songs to ravish the very soul, and a scene of indescribable brilliancy and delight, forming the grand finale—and a grand finale it was indeed, dear Ivan Andreovitch—of the festivities of Prince Alexis' birthday.

CHAPTER V

ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOURTEENTH OF OCTOBER

"YES; but the Princess Varvara, the Pink Pavilion, the black box, and the writing on the wall?" I put in, interrupting my friend Crop-eared Jacquot. "It seems to me we are rather forgetting all that part of the story."

Not at all! (was his reply); we are coming to it directly, Ivan Andreovitch. I am telling you the history not in the order of the events, but in the order in which I became acquainted with them.

Well, the Prince Alexis, as you may have gathered, was wild after sport of all sorts; but what he loved above everything else was bear-hunting. In those days the forests were not so over-hunted and poached as they are nowadays, and game of every kind was plentiful. We regularly put up every winter thirty bears or so, at the fewest.

I will tell how things were managed. Directly winter began to make itself felt, the Prince used to send out forty men into the neighbouring forests to discover where the bears were lying. All the peasants of the estate, and even those of neighbouring properties, were likewise warned, and they never failed to come up to the Castle to announce any discoveries they made; for they well knew the Prince paid liberally anybody who brought in

information that enabled him to enjoy his favourite sport.

He always tackled his bear hand-to-hand, and suffered no one else to bring the animal down. One and all had received peremptory orders. "Don't touch the bear, unless he has me down and is starting to mangle me; otherwise, as you value your life, hold off, and don't interfere."

He used neither gun nor pike, nothing but hunting-knife and boar-spear; and I assure you on my word, little father, he settled more than a hundred and fifty in his day. Again and again he found himself in very critical positions; and twice over he thought it was all over with him. The first time he had one thigh half eaten; the second the bear took him round the body, and hugged till the bones cracked. That once he called for help, but it was the one and only occasion. He was carried home in a dead faint on a sledge, and came very near dying of the effects. But God had pity on him, and he got well.

When we set out to hunt the more distant forests, as was done in autumn, we often remained for six weeks away from the Castle. On these occasions the Prince would take along with him the whole pack of dogs and the whole posse of huntsmen, four hundred pricklers with a thousand hounds, a hundred and fifty kennelmen, and from two to three hundred petty nobles. Sometimes we would encounter on the way two or three great lords as wealthy as the Prince himself, so that we seemed more like an army marching out to war than a company of noblemen going a-hunting.

Occasionally we would call a halt at the house of Peter Alexiovitch Mouransky, a neighbouring landowner, a nobleman, and extremely wealthy, but a poor pitiable creature. He was of feeble constitution, and so racked with rheumatic pains he could only walk with the help of a pair of crutches; yet this in no wise hindered him, directly he heard the hunting-horns and the shouts and uproar we kicked up, from coming out to meet and greet us, crutches and all, at the top of the Great Steps.

Once—listen, little father, listen, for we are coming to a terrible episode—once we arrived at this nobleman's door in the middle of a terrible storm. It was raining in torrents, and blowing fit to knock a Cossack off his horse. Out of the question to think of leaving in such weather;

so, instead of making a passing stop, we were bound to spend the night under Mouransky's roof. Every man slept as he could. Mouransky was for giving up his own room to his friend the Prince Alexis, but the latter would not hear of such a thing; so that eventually he was given a pavilion detached from the main building, which had not been occupied for years, and which consisted of two rooms only. Naturally, the Prince had the one containing a bed, while I slept in the other, on a rug they spread for me on the floor.

The Prince had been strangely melancholy, I had noticed, all day, as was always the case with him, indeed, on every anniversary of the fourteenth of October for several years past.

That morning he had actually dismounted at a little church by the way-side, had gone inside and said his prayers with the accompaniment of plentiful crossings and many deep sighs.

The Prince went to bed as usual, but without any talk with me. He merely asked me two or three times over—

"You are sleeping in the next room, are you not, friend Jacquot?"—to which I had answered, "Yes! your Highness," each time he put the question.

The nearer we drew to midnight, the fiercer grew the hurricane, while the wind roared in the chimneys and whistled down the passages in the most dismal fashion, sounding for all the world like the sobs and groans of some one in mortal pain. The shutters banged against the walls and the trees cracked every now and then in a way to make the boldest heart tremble.

At last midnight struck—just where, I cannot say, but it sounded as if the clock were in the room itself.

Of a sudden I heard the Prince calling, his voice not as usual, haughty and contemptuous in tone, but subdued and almost humble.

"Are you asleep, Jacquot, old fellow?" he asked.

"Not I, little father. Is there anything you want?" I asked in my turn.

"I don't know what has come over me," the Prince said next, "but I am afraid."

I thought I had misheard him. The Prince afraid?—the thing was impossible; he was one who feared, as they say, neither God nor Devil.

"Do you say you are afraid?" I asked him.

"Yes, I am indeed," answered the Prince, in a scarcely audible voice.

"And what of?"

"Do you hear that howling?"

"That whistling you mean, little father, don't you? It is only the wind."

"No, no, Jacquot," declared the Prince; "it is not the wind, it is something else."

"What is it, then?"

"Listen, I tell you, listen!"

"Why, yes," I said, after listening a while, "your dogs are howling too."

"But amid their howls do you hear one voice we have no business to hear?"

"One voice we have no business to hear! Why, what do you mean?"

"I mean the voice of my poor Arabka."

"You are losing your wits, little father!" I cried, beginning to shudder myself. "How can you say it is Arabka howling, when she has been dead this ten years?"

"It is Arabka, it is!" insisted the poor Prince. "When she was alive, I knew her voice among a thousand; am I likely to mistake it, now she is dead? There, can't you hear?" went on the Prince. "She's leaving the kennels and coming here. Listen, man; she's only five hundred paces away now; now she's only two hundred; now she's coming up to the door."

And in very truth the sound of a single dog howling in the dark was coming closer and closer every moment.

"Like enough, dear little father, one of your hounds has escaped from the kennels, and is nosing you down. Don't you often feed the dogs with your own gracious hands?"

"It is Arabka, I tell you! Ah, you don't understand, you don't, how much that's supernatural there is in this world."

"But what should Arabka want with you, your Highness? You built her a sweet little tomb, and had the best prayers of the Church said over her."

"There, didn't I tell you she would come to the door. Listen, listen there!"

And with my own ears I heard a long, dismal, melancholy howl that rose from the very doorstep of the Pavilion.

"Yes, yes, you are come to announce my approaching end to me, poor old

Arabka. . . . Oh, it is horrible, horrible! O God, O God, have pity on Thy sinful servant's soul!"

Albeit sorely moved myself, I wanted to prove to the Prince it was not Arabka at all, but some dog from the pack that had got out of the kennels. So I got up in the darkness, and made for the door.

The Prince heard me, and called out.

"What are you at, Jacquot? what are you at? Don't open the door, don't, don't! Once you open the door she'll come in, I tell you!"

But he was too late; the door was already open. To my utter amazement, I could see no dog whatever, either on the doorstep or anywhere near the Pavilion.

I could hear, however, the Prince's voice saying in anguished accents—

"You would not listen to me, Jacquot; you opened the door, and here's Arabka coming right into my room. . . . Get away, foul beast, get away! don't come near my bed! Ah, she's licking my hands now with her icy cold tongue, and my face. . . . Help! help! save me! I'm dying!" and the Prince's voice sank away in a sort of rattling sob.

I was perfectly certain I had not let any dog pass; but I shut the door to with a bang, and ran to the Prince's side, lighting a candle with all possible speed.

He lay in a dead faint on the bed. I looked everywhere about the room; there was no dog there, neither Arabka nor any other.

The sweat was pouring down the Prince's face, and his hands were clenched in dire terror. I threw water in his face, and he opened his eyes, shuddering.

"Is she gone?" he asked.

"But I tell you, little father, she never came in."

"I swear I saw her with my own eyes; I saw her come in through the door and right up to my bed."

"How could you see her at night time? She was as black as the Devil's oven—and that's why we called her Arabka."

"True; but then her eyes glittered like two live coals, and lighted up the room all about her. She came to tell me, faithful beast, it was time to begin thinking of my sinful soul."

"Come, come, little father, why return again to these silly notions?"

"Not at all. I am seventy years old,

and yesterday I dreamt I was marrying Macka, the cow-girl. To dream of a wedding is a sign of death. The day we left the Castle a sow had a litter of thirteen, a sign of death. Worst of all, on my last birthday a pane of glass broke all of its own accord—a sign of death, Jacquot, a sure sign of death!"

"Well, then," I told him—"well, then, my dear Prince, as you are so firmly convinced your hour is at hand, you should attend forthwith to your spiritual welfare."

"It's easy for you to talk like that, Jacquot," protested the Prince, in a dull, despairing voice. "My spiritual welfare, you say. Yes, truly, that is just what is troubling me."

"Just what is troubling you! Why, your Highness knows the first Pope you come across, for a hundred roubles or so, will make your conscience as clean and bright as a mirror! You have lived a good, easy, pleasant life of it; but you have never killed anybody or committed murder."

The Prince fell a-coughing, as if he would choke right away.

"But who told you that, Jacquot Petrovitch—that I have never killed or done murder, eh?"

I stared at him with startled eyes that seemed to frighten him.

"Jacquot," he ordered me, "leave me the light, get to your prayers in the next room, and when dawn breaks, go for a Priest."

I did as I was told, and withdrawing to my own room, fell on my knees. All night long I could hear the Prince sighing, sobbing, and beating his breast.

At daybreak I got up and put my head in at the Prince's door. "Do you still want the Pope fetched, little father?" I asked.

"Yes, worse than ever," was the answer.

So I started to find the Priest, and brought him back with me.

"Here's your Pope," I announced to the Prince. "Make your mind easy, 'tis a poor devil you can make what you will of for ten copeks."

Then the Priest came in—a young man of between twenty-eight and thirty, with a pale face and stern eye. He had only been Parish Priest a year, in a small village in the neighbourhood.

I left the two men together. For the

first ten minutes all went well; but at the end of that time I heard the Prince's voice raised in a tone of angry menace.

"What! you refuse to give me absolution, Sir Priest, and all for a miserable job like that?" he was shouting—"not when I offer you a hundred roubles—five hundred roubles—a thousand roubles?"

"Your Highness," the Priest made answer in a calm, grave voice, "though you were to offer me all the riches of our father the Czar Nicholas himself, I could not give you absolution. It is murder, premeditated murder, planned long beforehand, and executed in cold blood. See the Archimandrite or the Metropolitan; they have wider powers than a poor village Pope. But for me, I cannot do it, I cannot."

"I will have you scourged, miserable hypocrite, till there is not one strip of your skin holding to another!" roared the Prince.

"My life is in your hands, your Highness, but my soul is in God's. If it is His will I die a martyr, my soul will the sooner rise to His heaven above."

Then I heard the Prince's voice soften and assume the accents of supplication; but, without either softening or hardening, the other's retained the same firm, inexorable tone.

"Get you gone, vile wretch," cried the Prince at last, "and never let me set eyes on you again!"

The Priest made his exit with the same quiet, stately step with which he had entered, without the smallest appearance of being disturbed by the Prince's threats. He gave me his blessing as he passed through the outer room, and made straight for the door.

Pale as death and with bristling hair, the Prince followed him, holding a whip in his hand. He opened the door of the Pavilion, as if he was for pursuing the Pope; but when he saw him walking away so calm and dignified, the whip dropped from his hands, and he called after him.

"In the Lord's name, pray for me, pray for me, my Father."

Then, seeing his strength failed him, I ran to my poor master's help, caught him in my arms, and seated him in an arm-chair. He was fallen as weak as a child, and cried pitifully.

"And you, you will pray for me, Jacquot Petrovitch, won't you? We will

go back to the Castle this very day, and the instant we get there, you will go to the Archimandrite of Kasan, and order him to make many prayers for my soul's salvation. He is bound to pray. Is it not his business to pray? Do I not give him above a thousand roubles one year with another? Tell him if he prays well, he shall have a bell for his church that shall be heard from Saratoff the one way to Nijni the other. I have made my will, and I tell you I have appointed Mouransky, our host at this moment, my sole executor; he is the only man I can trust with so grave a duty. My son Boris is dead, and I have never seen my grandson Danilo, who has always lived at St. Petersburg. My neighbours are drunkards, every one of them,—neither to hold nor to bind. So to Mouransky I entrust my earthly concerns; but it is to you, Jacquot, to you and the Archimandrite of Kasan, I entrust my soul. You and Father Trifon, take heed of my bequest; you will have to answer for it in God's sight.

"When I am dead, Jacquot, they must lay me in our ancestral vault, at my father's feet, and you will have forty masses said for my soul in the church. Moreover, you will see my name is entered in the registers of the Synod, that prayers may be said in perpetuity for me. And be there yourself, Jacquot, when the entry is made, for the rascally Priests are very keen practitioners, very keen indeed!"

"And, by-the-by, the Blessed Virgin in our own Church here is badly in want of a necklace of pearls and a silver altar-cloth; I blame myself for having shut my eyes and pretended not to see she lacked these two articles. The Intendant, on whom I will write you an order, will give you the pearls and the ingot of silver you will require to carry out my wishes. You will order the things to be made at Moscow—but not by that thief Zoubriloff; he will have it I owe him two thousand roubles, and as he knows very well I shall never pay him, he would make them good out of the Holy Virgin's pearl necklace and silver altar-cloth. Ah! the abominable son of a dog," cried the Prince, clenching his fists as he got up, seized his whip again, and began striding up and down the room, "if ever I can lay hands upon him, the villain, my knout shall be the death of him!"

But at this moment a badly fastened shutter swung in the wind and knocked

against the wall, and the Prince turned all pale and trembling again, crying—

"God have pity on my poor soul!"

"But can't you see for yourself, your Highness, 'tis nothing? A banging shutter, nothing worse."

"But it's always nothing according to you. . . . Now, where were we? Ah, I remember. You need not buy any silk for a pall, for last year when my cousin german, the Prince Vladimir, went to Paris, I gave him the money to purchase a piece of the best Lyons silk. So you can use this to throw over my coffin. Still, even now I am not quite easy on this head."

"Why not, little father?" I asked him.

"Well, it appears my cousin Vladimir lives a very loose life at Paris, and drops enormous sums at play. Now, I know what gamblers are. He may very likely lose, when his own money is gone, what I have given him, without ever thinking how, by his fault, I am running the risk of setting forth for the other world shabbily provided, and presenting myself before God the Father like any beggarman.

"You will invite to my funeral all the aristocracy of the neighbourhood, as well as all the petty nobles; for I particularly wish the ceremony to be imposing and well attended. Only don't ask Kartchaguine; I detest the man with all my heart. He always adopts towards me, under pretence of being descended from Rurik, silly airs of importance and superiority that annoy me more than I can tell you; for truly I consider myself far above him in every respect. And above all, don't forget to set on my head a fine cap of gold brocade embroidered with pearls. You will see to it yourself to have it well made; nowadays they put them together in the most rubbishly fashion, so that they have no shape or form whatever."

"I will do all you wish, your Highness, never fear; but now the storm is passed and day come at last, will it not be best to sleep a while?"

The Prince Alexis followed my advice, and lay down again, while I took a seat in the next room, ready to come to him at the first call. Then I heard him turning and tossing in his bed like a man who cannot get to sleep. At last he uttered my name in a lamentable voice, and I returned to his room again.

"Sit you down there," he said, pointing to a chair by the bed's head.

When I had done so he went on—

"Listen now. There is never a man I have entire confidence in except you, my poor Crop-eared Jacquot, and I am going to make a clean breast of it. I am horribly afraid, after all the warnings I have had, of dying by one of those accidents a man meets with by the roadside when he least thinks of danger. In that case I should perish without confession or absolution. So this is what I want you to do. If I should die suddenly, and without time to get assoiled, you must set out a-foot—you understand—pilgrim's bell in hand, for Moscow; you must ask to see the Metropolitan, make confession in my stead, and perform the penance he assigns you. In this fashion I hope my poor sinful soul may win some mercy. Will you do this for me, Jacquot?"

"Yea, as truly as I would lay down my life for you, little father," I assured him, "I will do as you wish."

"Good! Then hear my confession," the Prince went on; and therewith he proceeded to tell me a dreadful, dreadful story.

CHAPTER VI

THE PRINCESS MARFA PETROVNA

"AT last, at last I am going actually to hear the story of the Princess Varvara."

Not yet, Ivan Andreovitch, not quite yet (was Jacquot's disappointing answer). Everything must come in its proper turn; so we must begin with the history of the Princess Marfa Petrovna.

The said Princess Marfa Petrovna had many griefs to bear in her lifetime, which was a veritable martyrdom. Her happy days were few, very few, in this world; may God give her His kingdom in the next!

Her father, the Prince Peter Ivanovitch, had originally refused her to the Prince Alexis, whose antecedents did not inspire him with much confidence in his future good behaviour. However, Prince Alexis, who had accompanied Count Orlof in his expedition against the Turks, having been sent home by the latter to carry the news to the Empress Catherine of the victory of Tchesmé which he had just won—Prince Alexis, deep in love with the beautiful Marfa Petrovna as he

was, answered the Empress, when she asked him what boon she could grant him, that he desired nothing whatever but to wed the daughter of her Majesty's favourite, Peter Ivanovitch.

Instantly, and without saying one word, the Czarina sat down at her desk and wrote the following letter:—

"Taking into consideration the services rendered us by the Prince Alexis Groubensi, and desiring to reward him for the good news of which he has just been the bearer, we would have it please you to give him in marriage your daughter Marfa Petrovna, and we pray you to arrange this matter without the smallest delay.

"May the Most High have you in His holy keeping.

"Your loving mistress,

"CATHERINE."

On receiving this letter, or rather on reading it, the Prince Trotinski first trembled violently; then, after bowing the knee thrice before the image of Christ, he said—

"The Czarina's will be done; we belong all of us to God and to her." And a fortnight later the marriage took place.

The ceremony was far from gay. The bride looked more as if she were going to her death than to her wedding; and for fear her melancholy should set ill-natured tongues wagging, scarce any marriage festivities were held, and at the ball held the same evening, no sooner was the Polonaise danced than all the guests took their leave.

They were married at St. Petersburg; but directly the rite was done, the Prince quitted the capital for his estates, taking his wife away with him to the Castle of Groubensi.

Six months passed without much possibility of knowing how the newly wedded pair suited each other. Not a soul was admitted to the Castle, and it was only when the Princess Marfa was seen abroad by some chance that the marks of an ineffaceable melancholy could be observed on her features.

Little by little the Prince Alexis returned to his old ways, leaving the Princess Marfa entirely to herself, and consoling himself for the fact that he never now received company at home by taking full advantage of the merry-

makings, hunting-parties, and entertainments of all sorts to which the great lords, his neighbours, invited him.

The result of all this was that the Princess found little pleasure in her home life, and it was not long ere her marriage began to seem an insupportable burden. The Prince, on his side, weary no doubt of all this repining, which was anything but complimentary to him as a husband, began to treat his wife in the harshest fashion, and would oft kick up—in the Princess's bedchamber for choice—such a disturbance, 'twas fit to drive the holy images out of the house, as the saying goes. It was even alleged that at times, when the Prince came home drunk, or got drunk within doors, he did not always stop short at verbal reproaches, but adopted methods with the Princess which left next morning, and for days afterwards, manifest traces on the face and hands of the poor lady.

The Princess was of a gentle and patient character, and tears were the only answer to her husband's brutalities. But this very gentleness and long-suffering, instead of appeasing the Prince's anger, only roused him to greater exasperation.

He proved unfaithful to his marriage vows—first during his absences at Moscow and St. Petersburg. Later on, he kept sundry Livonian girls as his mistresses, but still outside the Castle precincts. Eventually he maintained in his own house a number of Dames in Residence, as we have explained elsewhere. All this went on without the Princess ever uttering one word of complaint to any living soul, so used was she grown to bury her grief in her own bosom. Gradually the passive indifference of the Prince Alexis towards his wife turned to active hatred. He ceased from all relations with her, and most likely his race would have ended with him, had not the Princess, during the first year of their married life, borne him a son, the Prince Boris Alexiovitch.

So long as the young Prince remained at the Castle, his presence was a great consolation to the poor mother. She gave the greatest attention and care to his education, providing him with German and French masters, and personally superintending his progress in these two languages, which she spoke as fluently as her mother-tongue. The result was that Prince Boris at twelve knew them as

well as most young Russian nobles do at twenty.

But no sooner had young Prince Boris attained the age of fifteen than Prince Alexis, fearing this education under the superintendence of a woman should prove too feminine in character, took his son personally to see the Czar Paul I., who had just ascended the throne; and as chance so ordained that the Prince had a turn-up nose—which was an indispensable condition to the favour of the Emperor in question—the latter appointed him on the spot to an Ensigncy in the Paulovski Regiment, which he had just enrolled.

From the instant her son left her, the unhappy Princess, whose only remaining joy he was, lived the life of a recluse, and began to waste and melt away for all the world like a wax taper. She never appeared now except on great occasions, such as the opening day of the Fair or on her husband's birthday. Then, by express order of the Prince, she would dress herself in her finest array and attend all the grand ceremonies, but always dumb and silent, never answering but by signs and motions of head or hands. All the rest of the year round she remained shut up in her chamber, finding her sole and only distraction in prayer and in making ornaments for different churches.

The Prince received his guests in his own apartments, without troubling himself in the least about the Princess and her doings. The latter, as we have said, lived a uniformly solitary life; so that, while on the one side dissipation and debauchery, noise and merry-making, were the order of the day, on the other all was prayer and pious meditation. Often the Princess's loneliness was such that she would retire to bed without supping, not having a single servant available to give an order to, as the whole household was occupied in attending on the Prince and his boon companions.

Worst of all, a time came when the Princess Marfa Petrovna found herself deprived of her chief source of distraction—books. She had shed so many tears that her sight became affected, and she grew almost blind.

Fortunately, among the Prince's *protégés* living at the Castle was a petty noble by name Bieloussouf. The man had lost his modest patrimony through a vexatious lawsuit in which one of his

more powerful neighbours had involved him; so, finding himself with no visible means of subsistence, he had quartered himself on Prince Alexis, at whose expense and in whose house he lived in comfort, like many another.

He was past middle age now, full of excellent qualities of mind and heart, quiet, gentle, and affable to all around him. He had only one defect to distinguish him from his fellows; he could never be induced to touch either wine or brandy. To make up for this, he was extremely well read in the Scriptures and matters of religion, spending most of his time, indeed, bent double over great old tomes treating of every description of things sacred and profane. With this, he was scrupulously exact in the performance of all duties imposed by religion, always getting to Church before the Priest, and being the last to leave it.

The Princess, unable any longer to devote herself to reading because of her weak sight, sent for Bieloussouf and begged him to act as her reader.

Well, five or six more years slipped by in much the same way, the Princess fading away slowly all the while.

One day the Prince Alexis started for the chase; but at the very moment of his departure he met with a most annoying check. Scarcely had he got clear of the outermost fences of the demesne when he met a Pope in his track. Now, you know, dear little father, that as sure as a man meets a Pope at starting for the chase, he may give up all hope of sport for the rest of the day. You may be certain the Prince Alexis was not the man to let off the plaguey Priest who had spoilt his day's amusement without giving him something to remember; but he had only just settled accounts with him at the price of a score lashes when his horse took fright and almost killed him, falling and throwing its rider over its head into the middle of a great dung-hill. The Prince scrambled out safe and sound; but he was obliged to change every single thing he had on, being mired from head to foot.

That day they put up eleven foxes and three wild boars. But the foxes ran so cunning, there was not a single kill; while the wild boars turned on the dogs, ripped up a score of the best, and got clean away. You may be sure the Prince distributed a goodish few thrashings amongst

the company, but without satisfying his vexation; and that evening he came home as gloomy and lowering as a thunder-storm.

Just as he reached the Castle, a letter from Prince Boris was handed him. The moment he had glanced it through, he began to roar like an angry lion, after which we could hear a mighty crashing of broken glass and furniture and the smashing of windows. None of us could guess the origin of such an exhibition of rage, nor on whom it would spend its fury. One and all, we cowered in corners, each addressing to Heaven the mental prayer—

"Lord, Lord, save us from the dangers that threaten us this day!"

Presently we heard the Prince shouting—

"Send the Princess Marfa Petrovna here, some one, this very instant!"

A heyduc sprang forward to obey the order; but in a few minutes he returned to tell the Prince that the Princess's state of health was such she could not possibly leave her apartments.

The man had not finished speaking before he was rolling on the floor, felled by the Prince's fist; and from that day to this he has never been able to tell the full tale of his teeth, five or six of which have missed the roll-call ever since.

The Prince sprang over the poor footman's body, and swept upstairs like a hurricane to the Princess's chamber. She was stretched on a couch, very sad, and very ill indeed; beside her was Bieloussof, seated at a table reading aloud the "Martyrology of St. Varvara."

"So, Madam," shouted the Prince, "it seems you have brought up your son so well that he has ended by marrying a common baggage. Well, well, it was only what was to be expected of a son reared by a mother who spends her nights, and even her days, like you, with her lovers."

The Princess broke into a cry, and it was her last. She tried to rise, but her strength failed her, and she fell back swooning on her sofa.

The same evening the intelligence went abroad that the Princess was dead, and next day Bieloussof disappeared, and it was never known what became of him.

Later in the same day the Princess Marfa Petrovna lay in state. May God grant her soul His peace! The funeral was a magnificent function, at which no

less than three Archimandrites and a hundred Popes assisted. Retired and solitary as her life had been, the Princess had given away so much in charity that many bewailed her death, the poor in particular. As for Prince Alexis, he never shed a tear; all the same he looked terribly downcast, and every now and again was shaken by a convulsive spasm.

For six weeks following the sad event a whole host of beggars were fed at the Castle kitchens, while each was presented with a piece of money every Saturday. The burial alone cost five thousand roubles.

Throughout the dinner that followed the funeral the Prince Alexis gave himself up entirely to pious discourse with the Archimandrites concerning the best way of living a Christian life and the surest means of saving one's soul. He pronounced touching elegies on the angelic virtues of his dead wife, and expressed in lively terms the deep and exceeding sorrow and despair her loss occasioned him.

The Archimandrites said what they could to soothe the poor man's grief; but the Prince only said, addressing the one who had displayed most eloquence in the course of his consolatory remarks—

"No, 'tis very certain I cannot remain without her in this world below, and I beseech you, reverend Father, to receive me in the ranks of your brethren."

"Truly a most commendable purpose, dear Prince," was the Archimandrite's answer; "but to be really sound and good, every purpose should be fulfilled only after ripe reflection."

"Reflection! What is the use of reflection?" cried the Prince, wildly. "Think you I shall not pay my footing handsomely enough, Father? Nay, never fear. I will bring your House forty thousand roubles; why should I save and scrape any more?"

"But," objected the Archimandrite, "you have a son."

"A son indeed!" ejaculated the Prince. "You mean Boris? The good-for-nothing scamp! If he has any regard for his skin, I warn him not to let me see him. He is the real reason of all my grief, the scoundrel, and his poor mother's actual murderer! He has gone and married a slut without even waiting for our blessing or giving us a word of warning about this fine project of his. He killed his mother; I tell you he killed her, Father. The

moment Princess Marfa heard of the disgrace he had brought on our house, she fell back swooning; then came an attack of apoplexy, and all was over with my poor dear wife! But he shall pay for it, the villain! I'll leave him to rot on the straw, he and his fine madam; and if you won't have me in your Cloister, I shall marry and soon have another lot of children."

Next day, to show his grief, the Prince condescended to punish a number of offenders with his own hand. Every soul he met in his perambulations was more or less to blame for some fault or other. Petty nobles and household friends were spared as little as the moujiks themselves, and soon began to find their position at the Castle so untenable that they one by one disappeared, and their places knew them no more.

However, God be thanked, the Prince Alexis rid himself of these evil notions after a fortnight's time, and one fine morning started out to hunt the bear. The sport was first-rate, and his sorrow vanished as if by enchantment. From that day forth his life resumed its regular course, only in the midst of all the dances and banquets and entertainments the Prince was visibly ageing; and it would often happen that when he was out a-hunting, and would seat himself as of old astride a barrel of vodka, the glass would tumble out of his hand, and he would suddenly fall all gloomy and pensive. Then the laughter and shouting of his gay companions would drop into silence; but after a few moments of melancholy he was always the first to raise his head again and strike up an old-fashioned drinking-song, of which everybody present took up the refrain in chorus.

CHAPTER VII

THE PRINCESS VARVARA

PRECISELY a year after the death of the Princess Marfa Petrovna, Prince Alexis received yet another letter from Prince Boris, his son. After reading it, he broke out into horrible oaths, and summoning his Intendant and Chief Butler, he gave them these orders—

"Now, listen, both of you, and take care you don't forget a word of what I am going to say. Prince Boris will be here to-morrow with his slut of a wife;

mind you, I expressly forbid any one to greet them except with insults. You will admit them to see me; but their horses are not to be taken out, for I have simply and solely to teach them a little lesson, after which I mean to turn them out of the Castle. You understand your orders?"

"Yes, Prince," answered the two men. "You may rest assured it shall be done as you wish." And, indeed, so it was.

Next day, about eleven in the forenoon, the carriage conveying the Prince and his wife was announced as being within sight of the Castle.

I cannot tell you, dear Ivan Andreovitch, all the abominations the young couple had to put up with on their arrival at Niskevo.

The Prince sat gloomy and silent in his coach, while the Princess replied with smiles, though she was crying bitterly all the time, to the insults and ribald jests levelled at them from all sides. A hundred of the lowest ruffians had been collected expressly for the purpose of hooting them, which they did from the moment the carriage entered the village till it drew up at the Castle.

The Prince Alexis, with a great whip of plaited leather thongs in his hand, stood in the great drawing-room awaiting the arrival of his son and his son's wife. His eyes flashed fire like a wolf's prowling at night round a sheepfold. We of the household hid ourselves as best we might in corners, for we saw plainly an appalling storm was brewing. I had called in a Pope surreptitiously and concealed him in an out-of-the-way room, in case the Prince should proceed to such extremities that the intervention of a Priest would be absolutely necessary.

Over all the Castle brooded a silence like the awful stillness that precedes a hurricane.

At last the Prince and Princess appeared on the threshold of the great room. On their first entrance Prince Alexis made a sudden movement full of anger and menace, and raised his whip. But when he saw his son's young wife, so fair and sweet and good she seemed, a very angel come down from heaven, the whip dropped from his hands, his face changed completely, and losing all its threatening aspect, became in an instant affable and smiling.

The young people threw themselves at

their father's feet; but Prince Boris was the only one to put knee to ground, for Prince Alexis prevented the Princess from carrying out the movement. Throwing an arm round her waist, and fondling her dimpled chin with the other hand, he cried in his gentlest voice—

"So this is the naughty child, is it? Well, well, I can understand my son's infatuation now, when I see what a pretty girl it is. Kiss me, *Douchinka*; we'll get on very well together, never you fear."

Then, turning to his son—

"Welcome, Boris," he said. "I had meant to give you a sharp lesson, but when I look at your wife here, I have not the heart. God bless you!"

The turn things had thus taken astonished us prodigiously; but it must be admitted that the Princess was of such dazzling beauty and such angelic sweetness she would really have disarmed the rage of a tiger by a single glance of her lovely eyes. I ran to the room where the Pope was shut in, and got him away off the premises without a soul setting eyes on him.

That day, and for many days following, there were high times at the Castle; banquets and balls succeeded each other, as splendid and brilliant as in the best of former days. Only at table neither bear nor Dames in Residence put in an appearance, and no drunkards were to be seen littering the corridors. Everything was done with the utmost propriety, and when one of the Prince's friends ventured to whisper in his ear, "Are we not to visit the garden pavilions, then, and hold some converse with Olympus, eh?" Prince Alexis looked at him so sternly he felt his foolish tongue freeze instantly in his mouth.

All these changes were made under the influence and by the advice of the Princess Varvara. She had only to say, "Enough, dear little father. . . . No, it's not nice, what you're after there!" and Prince Alexis immediately yielded to her wishes.

Not only did he give up sending folks to the stables, but, more than that, all the whips and knouts and rods were burned, to everybody's huge satisfaction.

Nor was this all; for the Prince Alexis married off every one of his Dames in Residence, from the first to the last; and of the petty nobles and friends of the house, all who were reported turbulent

and over fond of the bottle were packed off to estates at a distance from the Castle.

The result of it all was that a strictness of conduct and a degree of orderliness were established in the household such as had never been known before.

Even the hunting-parties were conducted less riotously than of old, and the Prince entirely left off sitting on barrels of brandy and drinking to excess. He would still toss off two or three small glasses of vodka and treat his companions to the like, but compared with olden days, he kept both himself and them within the bounds of the strictest sobriety.

"Mustn't drink too much," he would say to his fellow-sportsmen. "If *Douchinka* got to hear of it, she would scold me, you know."

This excellent state of things continued a whole year, and the question of having little Prince Danilo to the Castle was much debated. He had been left all this while with his nurse, his parents not having dared bring him with them, as they could not tell how things might turn out. But he was thirteen months old now, his nurse wrote to say he was beginning to walk by himself, and Prince Alexis was dying, he said, to see his little grandson.

Unfortunately, at this point the peace which had followed the Battle of Austerlitz was broken, and the campaign of 1806 began.

Prince Boris was still in the army, and on receiving the news that his country was to take up arms once more against France, he felt bound to start for the scene of action.

The Princess Varvara was eager, come what might, to go with her husband. But Prince Alexis besought her, with tears in his eyes, not to abandon him in his old age; while, on the other side, Prince Boris held it was neither wise nor seemly for his wife to accompany him to the wars. Accordingly the Princess, yielding to the prayers of her father-in-law and the advice of her husband, made up her mind to remain at the Castle.

I can quite well recollect the sad, heart-rending farewells that husband and wife interchanged; you would have thought they foresaw the truth—that they were never to see each other again.

The Prince Alexis gave his son his blessing, touching him with a holy icon,

kissed him fondly, and bade him fight bravely and be a good soldier to the Emperor Alexander.

"For your wife," he told him expressly, "be under no apprehension; her life here shall be as pleasant and peaceful as a queen's."

After Prince Boris's departure, existence went on at the Castle much as before, indeed if anything, with even greater tranquillity, for the Princess felt her husband's absence deeply. Visits became less and less frequent, while balls and dinners were never so much as dreamt of.

The Prince Alexis scarcely ever quitted his daughter-in-law's side, and strove by every means in his power to reassure her as to her husband's well-being.

Alas! the Enemy of Mankind was sorely vexed, doubtless, to contemplate this resigned melancholy, so gentle and peaceful as to be almost happiness. Accordingly he breathed vile thoughts into the Prince's heart, inspiring him with an odious and guilty love for his son's wife, so that he set all the resources of his wits to work to rouse the like feeling in her breast.

As you may readily suppose, the young Princess was terrified, when she heard the man who had promised her husband to see her safe, talking to her in this dreadful strain. With all the gentle tact she was mistress of, she tried to make him realise all the horror of the sin he contemplated. But Satan had won too firm a hold on the old Prince's heart for him to be capable of listening to reason.

There was a sore struggle of wills, which lasted several months. At last, one day he was going hunting, the prickers waiting ready to start at the foot of the Great Steps, the Prince entered his daughter's chamber at six o'clock in the morning, under pretext of bidding her farewell, and did not leave it till seven o'clock.

Then suddenly he was heard shouting—"Send me Ouliachka and Vasilika here, some one!"

The two women were quickly on the spot, prompt as always to obey the Prince's orders, and found the latter struggling with his daughter-in-law, who could not scream, as she had a handkerchief forced between her teeth.

"Now, you two," ordered the Prince, "fix me up this pretty bird; you know how."

Then the two harridans tied the Princess's arms firmly behind her back, and discreetly left the room.

"Ho, trumpets, a fanfare!" shouted the Prince, throwing open the window and immediately closing it again.

Then two hundred hunting-horns blew a deafening blast, while the howling of the dogs, excited by the sudden fanfare, added to the din—which effectually drowned the cries of poor Princess Varvara. . . .

Once more riot and disorder reigned at the Castle of Groubenski. The Dames in Residence returned to their old quarters, which had been unoccupied for eighteen months; the garden pavilions were lit up to receive fresh bands of Olympian goddesses; while above the sounds of dance and song were heard, as of old, the yells of unhappy culprits who had been sent to the stables to be knouted.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SUBSTITUTE

THE Princess Varvara was 'sick—so sick that not a soul went near her chamber, no one either saw her or spoke to her any more. Had she fallen into the lake and been drowned she could not have been more absent from the Castle than she appeared to be. It was whispered, however, that she was firmly determined to set out for Memel, where her husband was quartered, but that the Prince Alexis positively forbade any such expedition.

Among the Prince's servants was a certain Grinshka Chatoune, who, to escape the obligation of military service, had passed ten years of his early manhood with the horde of freshwater pirates who, towards the latter part of the eighteenth century, used to cruise up and down the Volga, seizing vessels, robbing merchandise, and holding travellers to ransom.

One fine day, growing weary of the life, the fellow had come to the Prince, made a clean breast of it, and besought his protection, or, in other words, impunity for past misdoings. The Prince was very fond indeed of thwarting the justice of the Provincial Governors—a thing which gave him a high idea of his own power, and afforded satisfaction to

his self-importance. Accordingly, he took Grinshka into his service, gradually gave him more and more of his confidence, and ended by according him entire liberty of access to his person. In gratitude for these favours Grinshka had made himself spy-in-chief to the Prince, and by his means the latter found out whatever was afoot on his estates. The natural result was that everybody feared and detested Grinshka, and it was currently reported that when he was living with the pirates of the Volga he had sold his soul to the devil one night in the Forest of Saratoff, since which time he was given up to wizardry and every kind of abominable practices.

Now, this same Grinshka happened one day to lay hands on a letter which the Princess Varvara was writing to her husband to complain of her father-in-law's behaviour. What charge she preferred against the Prince Alexis nobody ever knew; but, as everybody could see plainly enough, after reading the letter the Prince fell into a train of gloomy reflections, and roamed all day long through the vast apartments of the Castle, holding his hands behind his back and whistling the *March of the Strelitz* between his teeth, which was always a sign with him of the deepest preoccupation of mind.

Next day the same symptoms were redoubled after his receipt of a letter from the Secretary of the Governor of Kasan. This official, who was devoted heart and soul to the Prince, warned him to be on his guard, inasmuch as the Governor, albeit one of his friends, could not avoid the obligation to make a descent upon his residence for the purpose of holding an inquiry—and this in consequence of a letter he had had from the Princess Varvara. At the same time the Secretary added that he would so arrange matters on his part that the visit in question should not take place till four or five days hence, so that, should any incriminating proof be in existence, it might be destroyed before the critical day.

After mastering the contents of this letter, the Prince went stalking up and down the Castle in a mood far more gloomy and thoughtful even than the day before.

All day long he took neither bite nor sup, but lowered like a thundercloud ready at a moment's warning to flash out

flame and fire, so that never a man of us dared face him.

That evening he sent for his familiar demon, Grinshka Chatoune, and remained closeted with him till daybreak.

What devilish art they employed the time upon no man can tell, the Lord God alone knowing what passed betwixt the pair.

When morning broke, the Prince Alexis issued orders to make whatever preparations were necessary for the journey of the Princess Varvara, who was to go to join her husband at Memel. The day was occupied in various arrangements, and the same evening a carriage drove up and stopped at the Great Steps.

Then the Princess Varvara, her face pale with sickness and the effects of moral suffering, came down the main staircase of the Castle and advanced to the outside balustrade at the foot of the Great Steps. There she halted and bade farewell to all. Respectfully approaching the Prince Alexis, she simply kissed his hand, without uttering a single word; but everybody could observe that as she touched the Prince's hand, she shuddered convulsively from head to foot, and all but fell over backwards on the flags.

"Well, well, God keep you, daughter!" said the Prince. Then, turning towards the women, "Put her in the coach," he ordered.

The Princess Varvara was helped into the coach, on the box of which, beside the coachman, sat Chatoune, while after the Princess there climbed into the carriage with her Ouliachka and Vasilika, the same two women who a month before had tied her hands together at the Prince's order.

The servants, when they saw this, exchanged glances full of foreboding, each thinking in his heart that their presence could only mean mischief, and that some great calamity was brewing.

At eleven the same night Prince Alexis left the Castle all alone, went down into the garden, and made his way to the Pink Pavilion, where he spent part of the night. At five in the morning he came out of the building, locked the door behind him with the utmost care, and threw the key into the lake.

From that morning on, every door that gave access to the garden was barred and forbidden, and not a soul was suffered to enter or so much as go near it.

Moreover, the same night on which the Prince left the Castle and went and shut himself up in the Pink Pavilion, another very extraordinary event occurred.

Aringa, daughter of the groom Nikisof, disappeared, without leaving word or trace behind her. She had been sick for a month past of a severe intermittent fever, and it was hard to believe she had been carried off by a lover attracted by her charms, seeing she was anything but comely, even when in full possession of her health. Her strange disappearance exercised all men's minds, though no one dared say what he could not help thinking of the matter.

A fortnight more, and Chatoune came back to the Castle, together with the two women who had accompanied the Princess Varvara on her journey. Their story was that the Princess, getting worse and worse the further they left the Castle behind, had eventually become so very ill that she was forced to stop at a small village on the road. She had had a doctor called in to prescribe for her; but his efforts had evidently proved fruitless, for the poor Princess had died on the evening of the third day after they had broken their journey at the village.

Chatoune delivered to the Prince Alexis the papers verifying this unhappy event, consisting of certificates given by the governor of the nearest town to the place where the Princess died, by the doctor who had attended her previously to her decease, and by the Pope who had officiated at her burial. These papers Prince Alexis took, and after reading them, locked them up carefully in his secretaire.

Now, need I tell you, my little father Ivan Andreovitch, that the Princess Varvara had, after being driven round the country, been brought back to the Pink Pavilion; that the Prince Alexis, with the assistance of that devil Chatoune and his two worthy acolytes, Vasilika and Oulichka, had walled up the Princess Varvara in the room where her body was found years afterwards, while they had put in her stead in the carriage that was supposed to be conveying the Princess to her husband, the groom Nikisof's fever-stricken daughter, who died on the road, and was buried under the name and in the place of the Princess Varvara?

To complete the plot, all traces of the terrible affair were soon afterwards utterly

effaced; for Chatoune and his two companions in guilt did not long survive. The very next day after their return to Groubenski, Prince Alexis ordered them to quit the Castle immediately, and go and live on one of his farms on the other bank of the Volga. It was autumn, and the river was sweeping down great floes of ice, which made the crossing extremely perilous. In spite of this, Chatoune and these two women obeyed the order, for no one would have ventured to disregard the commands of Prince Alexis; but they had not reached the middle of the stream before the frail boat that carried them was swamped by the ice, and all on board disappeared in the waves and were drowned without a chance of rescue.

On hearing the rumour that some of our folks were drowning in the Volga, we ran rapidly to the river, and there we saw the Prince Alexis standing on the top of a steep rock, his hands clasped behind his back. The wind had blown off his cap, which lay on the ground a dozen paces from him, and with his grey hair tossing in the wind he gazed calmly and fixedly at the three bodies the stream was carrying away in its rapid course, and which every now and again kept rising to the surface.

When every trace had disappeared—the three human bodies and the frail boat that had borne them to their death—the Prince Alexis crossed himself devoutly; no doubt he was repeating a prayer for the repose of the souls of his servants, who had just perished under his eyes. This done, he picked up his cap and set off homewards.

Thus it was that all traces of the tragedy were obliterated for ever, till the day came when the corpse, or rather the skeleton, of the Princess Varvara was discovered in the Pink Pavilion; and not only the Governors of Kasan, but all the Governors in Russia might have held twenty perquisitions and twenty courts of inquiry without unearthing a single fact.

But even as in the depths of the Volga stream lie the bodies the current engulfed, so in the depths of the Prince's heart lay remorse. So when he thought the hour of his death was announced by Arabka's howls, the dread secret came to light, and he knew no rest till he had told me all.

It is true that, two hours later, when the storm was blown over and the sun was shining again, when they came to inform

the Prince there were five or six boars marked down, the whole man was instantly transformed, and, forgetting or making pretence to forget the past, he sprang forward like a war-horse at sound of the trumpet. Dashing out of the Pavilion with all the eagerness of a young man of twenty-five, he cried, "To horse, to horse!" in his loudest and most ringing voice.

Then, leaping into the saddle, he started off at a tearing gallop, scarcely half dressed, and without a word of farewell to his testamentary executor, Mouransky.

As for us, we hurried after him, riding off as hard as our horses could go in the direction of the Forest of Uraginski.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

A WEEK more, and we were all back again at the Castle. There, in the great *salon*, a hundred bottles of wine—most of them empty, some half empty, twelve or fifteen still unopened, together with five or six casks of brandy on tap—bore witness, if not to the good taste, at any rate to the merry life led by the guests there assembled, and amply justified the loud bursts of merriment which could be heard floating out in great waves of sound from doors and windows.

Thirty or so boon companions were gathered together in the vast room. Each man drank as much as he pleased, and when fatigue and intoxication at length compelled one of them to snatch some moments of repose, he would drop asleep wherever he was—on the floor or on some rich sofa, in the midst of other recumbent forms and arms and legs thrown about pellmell and hands clasping the necks of bottles. Meantime, the Dames in Residence, dressed in mythological costumes, sang obscene songs and danced lascivious dances.

The Prince, uncombed, unshaven, and unpowdered for days, coatless, and wearing only his breeches and jacket, sat in a great armchair as president of the general orgy.

"Come, come," he would cry, "come, you devils, male and female, please try and be a trifle less depressing. You do really bore me to extinction, upon my word!"

I cannot tell you, Ivan Andreovitch, all the money the Prince spent at this time; he used to distribute handfuls of pearls and precious stones among the Dames in Residence, to say nothing of earrings and pins and brooches and rings, clasps and ornaments of gold set with diamonds, to say nothing either of costly stuffs of satin, silk, and velvet. It was a veritable golden age for all the Prince's satellites, and there is more than one moujik who has cut his beard and who now wears his shirt inside his trousers, whose wealth dates from those days.

The fact is, I firmly believe, that the Prince was not in full possession of his senses all this time.

One morning he was informed that the Magistrates were come, their business being nothing more nor less than to hold an official inquiry on the spot, in the Castle of Groubenski. At the news everybody struck his colours, and the revel fell silent as if it had been broken up by a thunderbolt; the Prince alone burst into a great fit of laughter.

"Every one go instantly to his post," he cried, "and have the knouts ready! I'll show the Magistrates a queer sort of inquiry, I will!"

The guests all vanished instantly, and the house was hurriedly put in order from top to bottom. A quarter of an hour later there arrived at the Castle a Major of Dragoons, accompanied by two Magistrates, having instructions to hold an official perquisition and inquiry.

The Prince Alexis, in full gala dress and with hair duly powdered, sat to receive them in the state saloon. When the Magistrates and the military officer entered, Prince Alexis barely rose from his chair, and, without offering them seats, asked them in a curt, cold voice what he could do for them.

"We have received orders, Prince," one of the Magistrates replied, "to carry out the most rigorous investigations as to certain acts of criminality imputed to you, of which to all appearance you have been guilty, against the Princess Varvara."

"Ah, ha, ha! So you have received orders like that, have you?" shouted the Prince, "and you come here to carry them out? How dare you show your nose, you miserable moujik, inside the Castle of Groubenski? Do you know who I am? . . . Who sent you, eh? Was it that cur of a Vaivode, or that

rascal of a Governor? If you come from them, they had better look out. I shall know how to deal with them, and they may very likely find themselves paying a visit to my stables; as for you, I promise you . . ."

"Calm yourself, Prince," interrupted the Major. "I have fifty dragoons with me, and I am not sent either by the Vaivode or the Governor."

"Who are you sent by, then, eh?"

"By our Father and our Czar, the Emperor Nicholas, who has just mounted the throne of his glorious ancestors."

No sooner had the Prince Alexis heard the words than he shuddered from head to foot, and, dropping his head between his two hands, muttered in a voice of despair—

"I am lost—lost and undone!"

The fact is, he had never for an instant expected the matter would have reached the Czar's ears.

Next he went up to the Major calmly and humbly, and swore by all the Saints he was utterly ignorant of what crime he could be accused, and that, were the Princess Varvara still alive, she would be the first to proclaim his innocence.

"It is the Princess Varvara herself that is your accuser," said the Major, "and here is her accusation."

The Prince started back panic-stricken. Had Chatoune betrayed him? Had the Princess been insecurely walled up in her sepulchre?

He took the paper of accusation in his trembling hands, and saw that it bore the date 1807—nineteen years back, that is to say. But the Emperor Nicholas, on ascending the throne, had announced his wish to have all the complaints brought against the great nobles of the Empire during the last twenty years submitted to him, that he might adjudicate upon them.

The Prince, when he noted that the complaint was in the handwriting of his daughter-in-law, dropped his arms by his side with an air of the deepest discouragement.

Presently the Major and the two Judges took their seats at a table, on which they laid their papers.

Prince Alexis saw it all, but with such a broken look he scarcely seemed to notice what he saw. He remained standing, staring wildly and distractedly about him, and repeating over and over again—

"I am lost—lost and undone!"

The Major, who presided over the inquiry, addressed the Prince—

"Prince Alexis, in conformity with a formal order of His Imperial Majesty, given in his Chamber of Secret Service, you will be pleased to reply with the most scrupulous accuracy to all such questions as may be asked you relative to the abominable crime you . . ."

"Oh, have pity on me, and save me from ruin!" broke in the Prince. "Be my father and my benefactor! It may be I committed crimes in my youth, and even in my maturity; but now I am a poor old man with grey hair, more than seventy years of age . . ." and the Prince Alexis threw himself at the Major's feet.

Now, just think, my dear Ivan Andreovitch, what a thing the fear of the Czar is! Prince Alexis was a great Lord, so great and powerful he would not have hesitated to take his whip to the governor of a town or even a Minister of State, if either of them had incurred his displeasure. Yet, on finding himself confronted with the majestic and terrible anger of the Czar, he felt himself so small and insignificant he fell at the feet of a Major of Dragoons.

"Do not ruin a poor old man!" he went on again, in a lamentable voice. "I have not much longer to live, that is certain, for they who have gone before me to the other world have warned me I am expected there. . . . Only spare me, and I will enter a Monastery and put on a Monk's habit. Be merciful, and I will load you with gold; everything here shall be yours, if only you will spare me."

"Enough," said the Major, shortly. "Come, get up. Are you not ashamed to grovel at my feet like this? Remember you are a noble, a Prince. So get up, and answer the questions I am going to ask you in obedience to the order of his Majesty."

The Prince rose from his knees, and, endeavouring to assume a confident bearing, said—

"As you wish me to answer, I will do so; but I do not know what you would be at."

"Be careful what you say, Prince, lest this hall become a torture-chamber for you. If you refuse to tell the truth of your own free will, we have efficacious means of forcing you to speak."

At this threat the Prince Alexis fell

back into an armchair, and turned lividly pale; his eyes grew haggard, and his breathing became difficult and painful.

The Major looked at his face, and saw that he was really not completely master of his reason. Accordingly, he put off the inquiry till the morrow, after taking precautions to prevent any one holding communication with the Prince.

A prey to the deepest despair, the latter roams like a lost soul through the vast and numerous apartments of his Castle—now suddenly fallen lonely and silent,—tearing out his white hair as he goes, and uttering dismal groans.

Wandering thus at random, he enters the Portrait Gallery, and in spite of himself casts a glance at the picture of the Princess Varvara.

Suddenly he stops and stands motionless, his hair rising on his head and his eyes fixed in a glassy stare.

He seems to see the Princess's face come to life on the canvas, and the head, but now so still and motionless, make signs to him, nodding slightly up and down. Then he thinks he hears the gentle angel voice of the dead Princess murmuring three times over—

"Murderer! murderer! murderer!"

The Prince Alexis fell on the floor a lifeless mass; his paralysed tongue could not articulate a word; his limbs refused their office, and were incapable of the smallest movement.

He was found stretched on the ground, from which he was picked up and carried

to his bed. There he was seized with terrible delirium, breaking out into a string of words without sense or sequence, while his eyes blazed with a fearful light.

The Major took compassion on his state, and sent for a physician, besides giving permission for the Prince to be nursed by his own attendants. The physician bled his patient, an operation which was followed by a great improvement. From that time the Prince began to talk connectedly, though he still found considerable difficulty in making his tongue obey him.

Presently he summoned his Intendant, and beckoning him to come close to him, gave him an order in a low voice—

"You will have a smear of black paint laid across the face of the Princess Varvara."

The Intendant had the command executed, and returned to tell him his directions had been obeyed.

"That is right," the Prince said. "She will not be able to speak to the Major now, as she did to me."

Those present thought he was relapsing into a state of delirium, but they were mistaken; he was dead.

The Prince being dead, the inquiry could lead to nothing, and was abandoned; and this was the reason why, instead of their being unearthed by the Major and the two Judges, the remains of the Princess Varvara—in consequence of the information I gave him—were discovered by Prince Danilo.

JANE

PREFACE

WHEN you travel in any country, and wish to impart information concerning that country to others, whatever you write about should be written from the national point of view.

Therefore, during my stay in Russia, I made it my business to collect stories, contemporaneous, as far as was possible, with our own days, since it was my intention to describe the Russia of the nineteenth century.

Here is a tale borrowed from the year 1812. It is taken from the reminiscences of Bestuchef-Marlinsky, a man of considerable talent, who was condemned to death in 1826, but whose sentence was commuted, by special grace of the Emperor Nicholas, to one of banishment to the mines.

Those who have read my *Travels in the Caucasus* will there find some curious and graphic details connected with that eminent author.

JANE

CHAPTER I

THE STORM

AT the moment when the army of Napoleon was approaching Moscow, the Russian fleet, in conjunction with that of Great Britain, was blockading, under command of the English admiral, the French fleet shut up in the harbour of Flushing.

During the worst season of the year, upon a sea exposed to all winds, and casting their anchors in widely varying depths, the combined fleets had to sustain a double combat, against foe and weather. Behind them lay the ocean with its roaring waves, before them were the batteries belching forth lead and flame.

In the month of October the storms are terrible and continuous. No one who has not experienced their fury can picture what such weather means to a fleet compelled to ride at anchor. Under such circumstances the ship remains stationary, but quivering in every limb like a giant enchained, and, no matter what the fury of the waves, is unable to fly before them.

The gale which sprang up during the night of October 16th, 1812, destroyed several vessels both on the Dutch and English coasts. All that night, amid darkness and storm, was heard from time to time that terrible boom of cannon proclaiming "We are lost!"—that last death-rattle of life which finds its echo in the grave.

As the day dawned—a day almost as dark and threatening as the night which had just passed away so slowly—the terrible situation of the fleet could be discerned. The vessels had fallen out of line; masts were gone by the board and cables parted; some of the ships, torn from their moorings, were drifting to

leeward. The waves ran mountains high, and seemed ready to swallow them up at any moment. The situation was appalling, even to the eyes of sailors.

The Russian vessel, the *Vladimir*, had sprung a leak in several places. She occupied the extreme left of the line, and was almost touching the rocks which extend for more than a mile into the sea in a direction parallel with the coast. The sailors, working with the energy of men who feel that their lives depend on the vigour of their arms, some at the pumps, the rest at the rigging, only gave proof to experienced eyes that all their labour would be ineffectual, and the destruction of the crew appeared inevitable, when, by an unhopèd-for chance, with the advent of day the wind dropped and the sea moderated. A gleam of hope pervaded the sailors' breasts, a hope which in a short time was exchanged for a certainty of escape. A tot of liquor was served out to the men, and order once more began to reign on board. Half of the crew were allowed to turn in; it was four o'clock in the afternoon.

The lieutenant, whose duty it was to arrange the watches, then came on deck, and, addressing the captain, who was pacing up and down, saluted, and said,—

"I have got everything in trim again, sir; the wind is nor-nor-west; we are anchored at sixty-eight fathoms with seventy-one fathoms of cable running."

"And how do the anchors hold, Nicolas Alexiovitch?" asked the captain.

"We are all right as far as that is concerned, and can ride secure; have you any orders to give me?"

"None, since you have seen to everything, Nicolas; accept my thanks, and congratulate the crew from me on their work of last night: had it not been for their superhuman exertions, we should be

at this moment clinging, like a piece of rag, to some rock, angling for star-fish."

The lieutenant was an old salt tanned by the suns of every climate, who wore his cap tilted sideways, and had allowed his right shoulder, through absent-mindedness no doubt, to assume a marked pre-eminence over the left. A cloak still soaked with rain hung from his shoulders without his having once thought of removing it; he held his speaking-trumpet in his hand.

He smiled on hearing the captain's words.

"Oh!" said he, "we have done nothing worth mentioning: when we were serving in the *Vladimir* in the Adriatic, we saw far worse weather than this. Luckily," Alexiovitch went on, "there are no typhoons in the Channel, though it would be an interesting sight to see them form and then disappear."

"Yes, my word, that must indeed be interesting, Nicolas Alexiovitch," answered Elim Melosor, a handsome young fellow of four or five and twenty, who wore gold epaulettes. In point of fact, he was aide-de-camp to the Russian admiral, but was serving, during the war, on board ship. "I imagine our Baltic typhoons are more dangerous to the grog glasses than to the ships."

"Quite true, my lad," said the old salt: "water was made for fishes and crabs; milk for children and consumptives; wine for young people and pretty women; Madeira for men and soldiers; but rum and brandy are the natural beverage of heroes."

"In that case," answered the young aide-de-camp with a smile, "I am not destined to immortality. I cannot look a bottle of rum in the face; I detest the abominable stuff."

"Ah, my dear Elim, with me it is just the contrary; my spirit is roused to action at the very sight of it. When you have trod the boards of old Neptune for thirty years, and have weathered as many squalls as I have seen hundreds of tempests, you will allow that a good glass of grog is better than all the cloaks in the world, blue-fox or sable, or what you please; at the second glass, you will feel yourself becoming inspirited; at the third, a bird will sing in your breast, and then you will lean over the side and see the waves pass by as quietly as if they were flocks of sheep. The masts will shout

and creak overhead, and you will take as much heed of their cries as *that*."

And the old tar snapped his fingers.

"For all that, Nicolas Alexiovitch, had it not been so dark last night, maybe we should have seen your cheeks turn pale at one or two critical moments."

"Hang me if there is a word of truth in what you say, Elim Melosor! Storms are life and breath to me. Would that Heaven would send us many such nights, for then the service would not be so neglected as it is in fine weather. When the wind blows, then feet and hands are busy, and I feel proud, for I seem to assume the command of all nature."

"Many thanks, Lieutenant, for your storm," said the young officer. "I was soaked to the skin and turned in supperless, as hungry as a dog, while, to complete my good fortune, I was rolled twice out of my bunk on to the floor."

"Come, come, you are a positive baby, my dear Elim," said the old sailor. "You would like your ship to sail in rose-water, you would wish that the wind had been created only to tickle your sails, and that lieutenants should serve as partners for fair ladies at a dance."

"Joke as much as you like, Alexiovitch, I declare that I should not refuse, at this moment especially, to warm myself up in the company of some pretty girl at Plymouth, or to have a pleasant nap, after a good dinner, at the Opera in Paris. I should think that a deal pleasanter than hearing the wind whistle, and being every moment on the point of taking my last drink from the same cup as the sharks and whales."

"For my part, I think there is always more danger on land than on sea. On land you are always running the risk of losing your purse or your heart. For instance, don't you remember when you took me to Stephen's house? I did not know how to pilot myself between the sofas and armchairs which blocked up the drawing-room; I would rather have steered on a starless night through the channel of the *Devil's Grip*. Ah! that confounded Miss Fanny; she looked at me so haughtily that I was ready to weigh anchor and sheer off at ten knots an hour to escape from her. But you are not listening to me, sir."

In point of fact, since the time that his old comrade had touched on the subject of women, Elim, half leaning on a gun,

had turned away and fixed his eyes on the coast of Holland. That distant shore seemed to him a paradise—there you could find nice people, witty men, and pretty girls; there you could find hearts ready to love and worthy of being loved.

A perilous reflection this for a man of five and twenty, especially when he is confined within that floating monastery termed a ship. Accordingly, Elim, who was suffering from that sublime malady called youth, had become doubly pensive at the sight of the land and at the words of his companion. He gazed at Holland with such affection you would have said that he had some treasure hidden there. The impossibility of leaving the ship gave him, besides, a more eager desire to go on shore, and he sighed so profoundly that, as truthful narrators, we feel ourselves bound to record that sigh here and direct the reader's attention to it.

The day began to decline, and as it declined the force of the wind increased and gradually changed into a storm; but, as all precautions had been taken beforehand, the advent of night was awaited with some degree of calmness.

At this moment a ship appeared on the horizon making for the fleet with all sails set. Impelled by the rising gale, she seemed to be endeavouring to outstrip it; presently she could be recognized as an English man-o'-war: her red standard gleamed amid the clouds. All eyes were turned in her direction.

"Ah, ha! let us watch how our friend will come to anchor in this wind," said Elim.

"Why, she must be mad," said a young lieutenant; "she is crowding sail as she enters the line! Just look, her masts are bending like reeds; you can almost hear them creaking from here. Either her captain must have got an extra set of masts up his sleeve, or else his crew are devils incarnate and not sailors."

A signal now appeared from the flag-ship, but the vessel, as though urged forward by some irresistible force, seemed not to pay the slightest attention to it.

"Why, she doesn't answer," cried several voices in astonishment.

"She is making straight for the rocks," said Elim.

Three flags were displayed together from the admiral's ship.

"Number one hundred and forty-three!" cried a sailor.

The lieutenant opened the code-book.

"The vessel coming from the open sea," said he, "is to form in line and cast anchor to port."

"Has she replied?" asked the lieutenant.

"She seems not even to have any idea that she is being spoken to," said the sailor.

Uncertainty, fear and astonishment were depicted on the countenances of all. The same signal was repeated, accompanied by a blank shot by way of reprimand.

The vessel still took no notice, and continued to make straight for the reefs.

In vain did the admiral redouble his signals; the ship seemed not to see them, and neither stopped nor even slackened speed.

All gazed in terror at the infatuated vessel. It was clear that she was going headlong to destruction.

"She does not understand our signals!" cried the lieutenant. "She does not hail from England, but from the ocean; at any rate, she ought to know the rocks, which are marked on all the charts."

"If she does not go about in one minute from now," said Elim, "she is lost."

The crisis was imminent.

The young man sprang into the nettings, holding on with one hand only, while with the other he waved his cap and shouted,—

"Port your helm! port your helm!" just as though, in spite of the distance, the vessel could hear him.

The ship was now close enough for them to see her crew, who were rushing about on deck, endeavouring to strike the fore-sail; but, just as they were engaged in this manoeuvre, a terrible crash was heard. The mast had snapped in two.

"His rudder is gone," cried the lieutenant; "he is lost!"

And, old salt as he was, he turned his eyes from the sight.

He was right; the doomed ship seemed to hurry to her destruction. Carried along by wind and current, although she had furled all her sails one after the other, she still flew towards her doom with headlong rapidity.

The crew were evidently in despair; no orders were given, no discipline observed. The sailors ran up and down,

extending their hands towards the other vessels, instinctively imploring the aid which it was impossible to convey to them.

Their last hour struck.

With the rapidity of lightning, with the force and noise of a thunderbolt, the vessel dashed on the rocks.

Instantly she was seen to go to pieces amid the foam. The sails were carried away in all directions; one of them flew like an eagle up into the clouds. An enormous wave once more lifted the floating wreckage and dashed it against the rock.

"All is over!" cried Elim, swinging himself back upon deck.

And indeed, at the spot where the ship had loomed aloft but a moment previously, nothing was now to be seen but the leaping waves, dashing against each other and breaking into foam.

"A signal, number one hundred and seven," cried the sailor.

"Help for the shipwrecked crew!"

"A noble order!" said Lieutenant Nicolas Alexiovitch, "but, unhappily, more easy to give than to execute."

At this moment three men—all that remained of the crew—appeared amid the foaming waves.

All three were clinging to the same plank.

Elim seized the old tar by the arm.

"Do you see them? do you see them?" he shouted.

"Great God! of course I see them; but what do you want me to do?"

"Then you think it is impossible to rescue them?" asked Elim.

"I do," answered Nicolas Alexiovitch.

"And I think it would be a disgrace for a Russian to regard as impossible an order given by an Englishman. Captain," he continued, stepping towards the officer commanding the *Vladimir*, "give me leave to lower a boat."

"I cannot prevent you from fulfilling a duty, Elim," answered the captain sadly, "but you will only lose your own life, and you will not save those unfortunate men."

"Captain, I have neither mother nor wife to grieve for my loss, and my father is a soldier, who will rejoice to hear that his son has died doing his duty."

"You will have no time to lower the cutter, and the small boats cannot live in this sea."

"I will go, were it in a basin; I think

it is easier to die oneself than to see others die."

"Ho there!" he shouted; "lower the *Gull*; five volunteers to the front!"

Thirty stepped forward. Elim selected five and sprang into the long-boat, whose speed and smartness had earned her a bird's name. One of the five sailors stationed himself at the helm, the others seized the oars, while Elim stood in the bows.

"Good luck!" shouted his comrades.

The ropes which held the boat were cast off, and the frail craft, disappearing amid the foam, seemed to be instantly swallowed up by the waves.

CHAPTER II

THE WRECK

THE boat reappeared at twenty yards from the ship from which it had been launched, just as a leaf blown by the wind is carried from a tree.

There were three inches of water in the boat; two of the men continued to row, while Elim and the two others baled out the water with their caps.

Then the four rowers eagerly resumed work.

Meanwhile, Elim was fixing the mast and hoisting the little sail.

When this was accomplished he looked round him and found that the fleet was already a long way off.

He turned round again in the direction of the shipwrecked men.

The plank to which the three unhappy wretches were clinging sank beneath the water every moment. They had scarcely time to take breath as they came up to the surface; then they disappeared again almost immediately.

"Lieutenant," said the sailor who was steering, "I think there are but two of them now.

Elim crossed himself, according to the custom of the Russians when they witness the departure of a soul from life.

"Never mind," said he; "all the more reason for pushing on. Courage, my friends, courage!"

The boat pitched wildly, and heeled over to such an extent that the edge of the sail dipped in the water again and again.

The men continued to row, but, more often than not, the oars only struck the air.

"Lieutenant," said the man at the stern in a hollow voice and wiping his forehead with his sleeve, "there is only one left now."

"Let us try to save him at any rate," said the lieutenant, crossing himself a second time.

Then, standing up in the bows and waving his handkerchief, he shouted in English to the one remaining sailor,—

"Courage, courage! hold on! we are coming." But he had not uttered this last word when the plank, which had again plunged downwards as he was shouting this message of encouragement, reappeared bare and deserted.

"Ah!" cried the lieutenant in despair, as he buried his hands in his hair, "the unhappy man had not strength enough to wait for us! Two strokes more, and we should have been there."

At the same moment the body appeared on the crest of a wave and seemed to stand half up out of the water. The lieutenant stretched out his hand to grasp him, but he was out of reach; he went down with the wave and disappeared for ever.

"Yorsko, did you see how his eyes were staring?" said one of the rowers in a low tone to his mate.

"Yes," answered the other, "and his fists clenched."

"The lieutenant has forgotten to make the sign of the cross for this one," said a third.

"And he is quite capable of coming and laying hold of the lieutenant by the feet to remind him of his forgetfulness," said Yorsko laughing.

"Jest with the living as much as you please, Yorsko," sternly observed the sailor who was at the helm, and who, being older than the others, exercised a certain authority over them, "but not with the dead, for it brings bad luck."

"Come, lads!" said the lieutenant, in a voice which not only drowned the whispers of the sailors, but was plainly heard even in spite of the whistling of the wind and the roar of the waves; "we have been unable to save the lives of the others, let us now think of our own."

A glance was sufficient to make the young lieutenant understand that with the wind against him and the sea

running mountains high it was impossible for him to regain the fleet. His only chance was to run before the wind and gain the shore, to pass the night there, and, should the wind change next morning, to make for the *Vladimir*.

In attempting to land to the left of the town, he had the wind full on his quarter, which gave to the little craft the speed of an arrow; the only drawback was that the land towards which the gale was urging him was a hostile shore, where, should he be recognised, death, or at least imprisonment, awaited him.

Elim had taken the place of the old sailor at the helm; three of the men baled out the water which they continued to ship; the two others held themselves ready in case of emergency. The boat heeled over to such an extent that two of the men, with knives in their hands, waited but the lieutenant's order to cut the sheets.

However, seeing the calmness displayed by Elim, the sailors, if they had not been sufficiently experienced to gauge the situation for themselves, might have believed themselves out of all danger.

Night came on suddenly; but by the last rays of daylight they had been able to perceive, from a broad stretch of surf that extended along the beach, that the coast was guarded by a line of reefs.

The wind drove the little craft straight for this white line, which could still be seen through the darkness, and the boat must have possessed the wings of the bird whose name she bore if she was to clear the terrible barrier against which they could now hear the roaring waves breaking.

"Strike sail!" shouted Elim to the two men who held themselves in readiness.

One of the sailors loosened the sheet and let the rope run, but the wind was so violent that it tore it from his hands, and the sail, set at liberty, began to beat the air so violently that the *Gull* shivered through all her timbers, and her bows, dragged down by the weight of the sail, plunged under the sea.

But, like a spirited steed that has stumbled into too deep a ford, she righted herself and rose again above the water.

Another similar movement, however, and the boat would be submerged.

Elim lost no time in giving orders; he plunged his hand to the bottom of the craft, seized an axe and, at the moment

when the little mast was bending like a reed, struck it with all the strength of his arm.

A prolonged creaking was heard, and the mast crashed down upon the prow.

"Overboard!" cried Elim, resuming his place in the stern.

The sailors, realizing the necessity of ridding the boat of this useless encumbrance, threw themselves upon the three-parts-broken mast, and, at the end of five minutes, both mast and sail were in the sea.

During these five minutes they had approached the reefs in such a manner that there was no possibility of working the boat either to right or left; luckily, the beach on which the waves drove our adventurous sailors was level with the water.

Elim entertained the hope of clearing it.

"All hands astern!" he cried, when he saw that the boat was about to strike the rock.

The sailors obeyed the order; the half of the boat rose out of the water, as a whale that comes up to breathe, and, instead of the bows, it was now the stern that bore down.

The boat was crushed to pieces; but the sailors and their young officer, springing forward, found themselves in comparatively smooth water, while the fury of the sea spent itself against the reefs.

"Courage, lads, and make for the shore!" cried the young lieutenant. "If there is one of you who cannot swim, or who feels himself exhausted, let him lean on my shoulder."

The noise of the storm, however, drowned his voice. The waves, as though furious at seeing their prey escape them, leapt the reefs and pursued the swimmers.

But the latter were already beyond their reach, and now felt the bottom beneath their feet.

Elim stopped to make sure that none of his men had been left behind, and found that all five were with him.

"My word," said the old tar; "I quite thought for a minute that the forgetting of the sign of the cross would bring us disaster; so, Lieutenant, if I may give you a bit of advice, it would be to make two signs instead of one."

"There was a moment," said Yorsko, "when it seemed as if that confounded

drowned man was dragging me by the legs, so I gave him a good kick."

"Would you like to know where your kick went to?" replied one of the sailors to Yorsko, pointing to his eye, which was black and blue; "there it is!"

"It was you, then, who so imprudently seized me by the leg?" asked Yorsko.

"Look here, when a fellow is at the bottom of the sea, and has cut such a caper as we have just done, he lays hold of whatever comes to hand."

While joking over the peril which they had just encountered, with that nonchalant disregard of danger which is one of the virtues of sailors of every nationality, our six wrecked mariners, still led by the lieutenant, had gained the shore.

The sea roared below, but only the spray could now reach them.

"We have got out of the water, and a good job too," said one of the sailors; "but we shall be frozen here."

"Wait until the Cossacks' sun* appears," said Yorsko; "and you can dry yourself by its rays."

"Go on!" said another, "I should smoke a pipe."

"What a pity you didn't think of that sooner," said the sailor with the black eye; "you might have lighted it at the three dozen candles which I saw when Yorsko presented me with that kick on my nob."

But for all their jokes, the poor wretches were shivering. Elim himself, spite of his courage and lusty youthfulness, felt himself gradually overpowered by the cold.

"Come, come, my lads," said he to two sailors who had lain down in the mud and seemed disposed to give way to torpor, "get up, and look sharp about it! Remember, those who sleep here to-night will wake to-morrow in another world."

"All right, Lieutenant, what next?" said the sailors, getting up and shaking themselves.

"Well, my lads, now we will try and find a lodging where we can pass the night. Perhaps we may fall in with some worthy people who will not betray us, and to-morrow morning we will seize a fishing-boat and get out to sea."

The plucky young fellow tried to inspire

* As it is especially at night that the Cossacks make expeditions, the northern Russians call the moon the Cossacks' sun.

his sailors with a hope which he did not entertain himself.

"Only," he added, "we must not separate; follow me, and speak softly; remember that you talk Russian, and that we are in Holland."

"Oh! I may talk," said Yorsko; "I know the language of the country."

"You know Dutch?" said Elim; "where the deuce did you pick it up?"

"Was I not a freshwater sailor before I took to the sea?"

"Well, what of it?"

"Well, I learned Tartar at Kasan."

"And you are going to speak Tartar to these Dutchmen?"

"Of course. Don't all heathens speak the same lingo, Lieutenant?"

Although the situation was not cheerful, the young lieutenant of the *Vladimir* could not help laughing at the tone of conviction in which Yorsko enunciated this somewhat erroneous opinion concerning the universal language spoken by all those not professing the religion of the Greek Church, in the bosom of which Yorsko had had the good fortune to be reared.

For about ten minutes, the sailors, guided by Elim, walked along a narrow path at ten paces from which it was impossible to see anything, so great was the darkness. The young man stopped occasionally; but he could hear nothing except the noise of the wind and the roar of the waves.

At last, having gone a little more than a mile, our travellers began to hear a sound which, in proportion as they advanced, drowned even the roaring of the sea. They realized that the sound proceeded from a torrent, and, dark as was the night, they presently distinguished something darker still, namely the walls of a mill.

"Halt!" said Elim.

"What for, Lieutenant?"

"Because the French may be there."

"But, with all respect to your superior judgment, even if the devil were there, I think we should go in all the same."

"They will make it pretty warm for us if the French are inside," said the sailor with the black eye.

"Warm?" said Yorsko. "That's the very thing I want: I declare I am dying of cold."

"And I am mad with hunger," said

another; "I believe I could eat the mill-wheel."

"What do you advise, my lads?" said Elim; "for you understand that, situated as we are, there is no question of superior or inferior; we are all brothers."

The sailors held a consultation.

"Well, Lieutenant," said Yorsko, "the general opinion is that anything is better than to die of hunger or cold."

"And if the French are there?"—objected the young officer.

"What of it, Lieutenant. Well, look, I will explain. In any case, they will not begin by eating us; deuce take it, we should be too big a mouthful. The worst that can happen to us is to be taken prisoners."

"No doubt; but you will allow that it would be still better to have a good supper and a comfortable bed and go back to-morrow to the ship."

Yorsko shook his head.

"It would certainly be much better," said he; "but I think you are asking for too much at once, Lieutenant."

"Who knows?" said the young man: "this mill must be some distance from the town; well, the miller must conceal us, voluntarily or by compulsion; and, when day comes, we shall see how to act. Arm yourselves with anything that comes to hand—I have my dagger—and let us enter quietly."

The gate was fastened on the inside merely by a wooden bolt loosely fastened, which gave way as soon as the gate was shaken. They were in the courtyard; that was something gained. Elim searched for the door of the dwelling-house and soon discovered it.

The door yielded, as that of the courtyard had done: it opened upon a dark passage, but a light shining beneath another door indicated a lighted chamber.

The young lieutenant went straight up to this door and opened it boldly.

He stood at the entrance to a kitchen brightly lighted up.

The fire blazed merrily in a large fireplace, and in front of this fire a goose was slowly turning on a spit.

This kitchen was spruce as only Dutch kitchens can be. The saucepans gleamed like so many suns on the walls, which were garnished with crockery, while in the centre of this luminous system a table, round like the earth, was set with dishes, plates and glasses.

Two enormous beakers crowned the table, at the mouths of which was seen, like a fringe of silver, a fresh froth which denoted that the beer which filled them had been poured out the moment before.

There was wherewithal both to warm and fill the six shipwrecked mariners.

But, to their great astonishment, there was absolutely no one in the kitchen, although near the table lay a dog.

The dog neither barked nor stirred.

"Hallo! this is the Promised Land which God has allowed us to enter," said Yorsko. "The dogs apparently are not on duty, even at night."

A door led from the kitchen.

Elim opened this door and stood speechless with astonishment. He found himself on the threshold of a room where a woman, gagged and with her hands tied, was lying on the bed.

He turned towards the sailors, who had followed him on tiptoe.

"What does this mean?" he asked.

"Probably she chattered too much," answered Yorsko.

"Good! and here is a man," said the sailor with the black eye, stumbling over a body.

"By Jove, it is the miller," said Yorsko, stooping to have a look at him; "and a fine healthy man too."

The miller, unable to speak, uttered a groan; he too was gagged like his wife.

Meanwhile Elim was listening at a door which led to another room.

"Silence!" said he, motioning with his hand to his companions.

A sound was heard of confused voices, tears, threats and curses.

Elim grasped the meaning of some words, half French, half German.

The words doubtless appeared to him to require his presence, for he tried to open the door; but finding it fastened, he shook it roughly.

The door held fast.

"Open!" he cried in French.

Then he repeated in German:—

"*Machen sie auf!*"

"What for?" answered a voice in French.

"Open and you will find out!" cried Elim.

"Go and be hanged!" replied a voice, "and leave us to do our own business."

And the cries were redoubled.

"Will you allow us, Lieutenant?" said

Yorsko, who had not yet dropped the two stones with which he had armed himself.

Elim stood back from the door. Yorsko placed one of his two stones on the ground, raised the other with both hands above his head, and hurled it with the force of a catapult at the door, which broke into splinters.

An unlooked-for sight was presented to the eyes of the lieutenant and his men.

Four of those marauders belonging to no country in particular, but who follow in the train of armies like wolves and ravens, ragged, half-drunk, their uniforms in tatters, were busily plundering the room.

One of them held his sword uplifted over the head of an old man seated in an armchair, while another rifled his pockets; a third held his pistol at the head of a girl who was on her knees and calling for her father; a fourth was emptying a bottle of wine prepared for supper while he stuffed into his pockets the silver which he had taken from the table; a fifth, in one corner of the room, was forcing the locks of a chest.

"Help, my friends!" cried Elim, hurling himself upon the ruffian who was threatening the girl.

"Ah! you thief!" shouted Yorsko sending his second stone into the ribs of the man who held his sword over the old man.

"Scoundrels!" shouted the others, dashing with uplifted sticks upon each of the remaining actors in this scene.

"We are surrounded!" cried the marauders, without even attempting to resist; "let us fly!"

And, breaking a window, without knowing what was below it, they sprang out of the room.

The window overlooked the torrent.

The cries of the first two or three made the others hesitate; but, urged by the lieutenant's dagger and the bayonet belonging to the man who was trying to burst open the chest, and which Yorsko had picked up, they were compelled to follow the road taken by their companions.

All this had been the work of a moment. The old Dutchman, clad in a dressing-gown and still buried in his armchair, had witnessed with profound astonishment all that had occurred.

The sight of half a dozen men scantily clothed, with long beards, belonging to God only knows what race, caused him

to think, with some degree of probability, that he had only made an exchange of robbers. The exclamation: "Great heavens!" then an "Ah! ah!" which changed into an "Oh! Oh!" and ended with an "Eh! eh!" proved that his brain was momentarily confused.

His daughter, however, was more grateful than he was, or, at any rate, demonstrated her gratitude in a clearer manner. She had had no difficulty in recognising in the six men who had just entered a leader and five subordinates. The unexpected transition from fear to joy had so surprised her, the delight was so great, that she had almost thrown herself upon the young officer's neck; but she had contented herself with grasping him by the hand and thanking him with tears in her eyes for the assistance which he had just rendered them. Elim bowed to the girl, and the girl curtsied to Elim, laughing and crying both at once. The old man, still buried up to his neck in his arm-chair, gazed at them in astonishment, while Yorsko and his comrades, drawn up in line as if awaiting inspection, looked on with the silent smile which subordinates of all countries maintain in the presence of their superior officers.

At last, observing the young lieutenant's frank and noble countenance, the old man breathed more freely. He rose, leaning with one hand on the arm of his chair, and raising his nightcap with the other,—

"To whom am I to express my gratitude?" he inquired in French, having heard the young Russian officer employ that language more especially.

"To a man cast by the storm upon your coast," replied Elim, "and who asks of you, not hospitality, but a place of refuge; I am a Russian officer."

And at the words he threw off his cloak and displayed his uniform.

"A Russian officer!" exclaimed the Dutchman, falling back in his chair as though the news had paralyzed him, "great heavens!"

Such a beginning augured ill for Elim; he knew that there were in Holland a great number of people favourable to King Louis, and the owner of the house might very well be one of his partisans.

He accordingly went on,—

"May I hope, sir, to find in you a friend, or, at least, a friendly enemy? If you refuse to shelter us for a time, at

least do not hand us over to the French."

"Allow me, allow me, young man," replied the Dutchman eagerly—"August van Naarvaersen was never a traitor, and all the Dutch from first to last have been friends of the Russians since the time of your Peter the Great, myself especially, inasmuch as my wife's grandfather was master-carpenter to your Emperor at Saardam. With me you and your companions are therefore safe from danger, for a few days at least. Here is my hand, the matter is arranged. And now, my friend, what is your name, *saperloot*?"

"Elim Melosor," replied the young man, delighted at the turn affairs had taken.

"Well, my friend Elim. Melosor," continued the old man, "take off your wet uniform; after which, with glasses in our hand, we will make all our arrangements."

Then at last the old man made up his mind definitely to rise from his arm-chair. Yorsko had already unbound the man and woman whom they had found in the first room, and, at the orders of the master, the grateful cook—whom Yorsko had had the good fortune to rescue—had carried off the five sailors to supper.

As for Elim, the old man had taken him under his charge; he had taken him to a large closet and provided him with a dressing-gown and a change of linen; in a word, had looked after him as if he were his own son.

After ten minutes employed in making a change of toilet, the young officer entered the dining-room in some confusion at presenting himself before the daughter of his host in flowered dressing-gown and slippers. Luckily, the situation excused him.

Supper was now served.

Elim began to feel quite a different man from what he had been an hour before. His twenty-five years, which had not gone to the bottom of the sea with his cap, a warm room, a good supper, mellow wine, a pretty girl, a smiling host—all these things not only restored to him his accustomed gaiety, but made him merrier than he had ever been before. He drank with his host, laughed with the daughter, and ate enough for that day and the next, like a man uncertain of the future. I am well

aware that what I have just related is contrary to the custom of all heroes of romance, who neither eat nor drink.

Doubtless all authors at the beginning of this century suffered from gastritis; but we are in the middle of the century, and everything has followed the law of progress. Literature to-day is as realistic as Nature herself. It is only humming-birds that exist nowadays on essence of roses and drops of dew: the nightingale breaks off her song and descends from heaven to pick up a worm from the ground.

Elim, like all Russians of distinction, spoke French perfectly. German, too, was almost his mother tongue, for he had been brought up by his mother, who was a German. There was no difficulty therefore in carrying on the conversation, for these were just the languages spoken by August van Naarvaersen and his daughter.

At dessert, the young lieutenant, who had never felt in such a happy mood, became uproarious with merriment, and told stories which delighted his host beyond expression; the worthy Dutchman had never laughed so much in his life.

"Ah! my dear Elim!" he cried, falling back in his chair and holding his stomach with both hands, "you are certainly a funny fellow: you may make your mind easy, we shall not let you leave us in a hurry, shall we, Jane?"

The girl blushed. It was easy to see that, if she had been told to hold back the young officer by the flap of his coat, she would not soon open her hand.

"Really," said Elim, "I hardly know how to express my gratitude to you."

"That's all right; you have paid for your entertainment in advance," said the old man. "Do you know the loss you have saved me from, *saperloot*? it is no trifle. I received twenty thousand pieces of gold to-day from the French for a consignment of cloth. These confounded marauders were going to rob me of them when you arrived. You tumbled from the sky, my dear Elim, and never will you arrive anywhere more opportunely or deserve a better welcome."

"Tumbled from the sky!" repeated Elim, "came up from the sea, you ought to say, my dear host; but, if I have had the good luck to scare away these rogues, I have the bad luck to be obliged to fly

in my turn; we shall have to disguise ourselves in sacks of flour to-morrow, Mynheer August van Naarvaersen."

"Oh! perhaps you imagine that August van Naarvaersen, whose name you have got so pat, the chief manufacturer of cloth in all Holland, lives in a mill? *Saperloot*! No, my dear fellow. Let me tell you. I was delayed, and stopped here to spend the night, after sending my carriage to the town to make some purchases. To-morrow morning we shall start for the factory; we shall shut the sailors up in a room apart where they must not jabber too loud nor show their faces at the window, but where they will have plenty to eat and drink. As for you, you shall be a relation of ours arrived from Frankfort-on-Main; then, at the first opportunity, we will find some trusty fellows to take you back."

Elim was delighted; the thought of spending several days with the charming Jane made him, he hardly knew why, the happiest man in the world. Several days! at the age of twenty-five, that is a century, just as a piece of gold is riches to a child.

He got up then from his seat, full of unknown hopes, bade good-night to the worthy Dutchman and his daughter, went to bed and slept soundly.

And all through the night the golden bird of dreams sang to his heart its sweetest strains.

CHAPTER III

THE JOURNEY

ELIM woke late and sprang out of bed. Warm water and scented soap removed the last traces of the last night's storm. His toilet was a short one; Nature had endowed him with the qualities which she bestows upon her favoured ones, and which simplify all toilets—youth and beauty.

To his great delight, instead of his flowered dressing-gown, he found a complete suit of well-fitting clothes which had been brought that morning from the town. He dressed therefore as an ordinary citizen, which was a safer costume for the moment than a Russian uniform, however elegant, and went into

the dining-room, where the *samovar* was already boiling.

"Late bird! *saperloot!* late bird!" said the old Dutchman, holding out his hand: "long slumber, pleasant dreams, eh?"

Elim smiled.

At this moment Jane entered, and, raising her beautiful blue eyes shyly, said,—

"Good morning, Monsieur Elim."

Elim wished to reply to this simple greeting, but blushed like the morning sky. His tongue got in his way, and Jane seemed to him so beautiful that he could only gaze at her with an expression far more eloquent than words. And, in truth, she was charming in her morning costume.

A little cap, or rather, a simple square of lace placed on her head and fastened under the chin by a pink riband, allowed a mass of fair hair to fall in every direction, encircling a face so fresh and velvety that the riband paled by contrast with it. In each of her cheeks lurked one of those dimples styled by the poets of the eighteenth century "nests of love." On her breast, heaving with emotion, Elim, in his capacity of sailor, thought he perceived two undulating waves which, impatient of their muslin barrier, were ever trying to burst it. Below was a round waist so flexible, that it seemed to court the aid of a protecting hand to prevent its breaking. Lastly, to complete the charms of this sweet flower of sixteen, came two feet which seemed to have been modelled to the size of Cinderella's slipper.

Elim was still at that age when men do not seek for an intimate friendship, but are greedy for love, and, obedient to the promptings of their heart, feel but one want, namely, that of not loving fruitlessly. Later on, when weary of the caprices of love, they look rather for intelligence than for sentimental affection, and a witty mind attracts them more than a timid heart does.

Elim had not yet attained this exalted wisdom. If he gave his heart, he demanded another heart in return. He loved in order to love, and not to argue about his love. His heart flew to meet that of the girl who, but the evening before, was a child playing with her doll, who had as yet taken no notice of those mechanical automata called Dutchmen.

Sixteen is a critical age for a girl. A charming face, a frank and lively disposition, and, above all, the determination with which she resolved to protect the unfortunate men who had come to the mill to ask for shelter—all this formed one of those situations in which the feelings, conflicting together, strike out burning sparks by which the heart is inflamed. Seeing Jane did not conceal her sympathy for Elim, however inexperienced in love our young lieutenant may have been, he could not fail to perceive that Jane was far from entertaining any aversion for him. From the morrow of the day on which they had become acquainted, they began to converse fluently, if not with the mouth, at any rate with the eyes, which is often even more dangerous.

Occupied in contemplation of the girl, or rather, quite absorbed in this contemplation, the young sailor gave but inattentive answers to the questions and witticisms of August van Naarvaersen, who, moreover, when he took his coffee, smoked his pipe or read the *Commercial Gazette*, was so taken up with these serious occupations, that he neither saw nor heard anything of what was going on round him.

However, at one of such moments, the noise of a door creaking on its hinges as it opened attracted everybody's attention.

The person, still unknown to our readers, who came thus unexpectedly to mingle in the life of our hero and heroine, was tall and thin and wore a tight-fitting black coat. His nose protruded at such a sharp and prolonged angle that his face resembled a sun-dial. He had a habit, peculiar to himself, of raising his eyebrows and eyelids by a slight contraction of his forehead, in such a fashion that you might have thought that his eyebrows wanted to fly away and his eyelids to take their place. Occasionally you would see him make an effort to smile, but the effort proved abortive.

This man was van Naarvaersen's cashier. You might have guessed his occupation by the big book which he carried under his arm. Upon a heart of red morocco in the centre of this book was written:—

"*Groot boek*" (great book).

"Ah! good-day to you!" cried Mynheer August upon seeing him; "we

were expecting you; give me a pinch of snuff, Quenzius."

Quenzius, in addition to being cashier, acted also as snuff-box to his employer.

He accordingly opened an enormous snuff-box, harmoniously adapted to the nose which it had the honourable office of supplying, and presented it respectfully to the master of the house.

"Well, what news in the town?" asked Jane's father as he took the pinch of snuff with a slow and noisy inhalation.

Quenzius' mouth, which, in repose, took the form of a blue line which was lost in the red of his cheeks, opened like a window. "There is no news," he answered.

"What do the Orange faction say? What are the Napoleonists doing?"

"Things are to-day just the same as yesterday," replied the man with the big book.

"That is just like you, brother Quenzius! close as a Trappist monk. If I were a king, I would make you my secretary. Did you get a receipt from van Seinten for the cloth you delivered to him?"

This question appeared very agreeable to the cashier. He opened his book with pride and showed his employer a page covered with figures. The latter's countenance beamed.

"Good business! a nice profit!" he murmured; "clearly, my factory does not resemble the hanging gardens of Babylon, and my credit is more stable than the pyramids of Egypt. Well, sir, now, in God's name, we can set out."

All was in readiness for the departure; in an instant a carriage, to which four big horses were attached, made the pavement tremble, and our traveller started for the chief factory of Mynheer August.

The father and daughter seated themselves facing the horses; Quenzius and Elim took the opposite seat.

The young officer was so delighted at finding himself opposite the fair Dutch maiden, that all the sights they passed on the road, however interesting, could not divert his eyes from the object of their contemplation. Our young man was so happy to travel in this way, that he would fain have gone on for ever. His whole universe was with him. You would have said that he had dropped the past together with his cap at the bottom of the sea, and was entering another world and a new future. He only asked of fate one

thing, namely, to make as many hollows and ruts in the road as possible, and you will guess why, dear readers, if you have ever been in a carriage with a woman whom you loved. It was in order that his knee might touch Jane's.

It would be interesting to make the experiment of how great a charge of electricity a girl's knee can contain.

It would be useless, then, for the reader to expect from Elim a narrative of his journey or a sketch, however slight, of the cities, towns and scenery through which he passed. But, by way of compensation, he knew the girl's topography by heart, and could have talked learnedly to us of the smallest grain of beauty scattered by Nature over her face and shoulders.

Meanwhile, the carriage rolled on swiftly, drawing nearer to the factory. Elim had forgotten the whole world. The old man's scientific disquisitions on the subject of the dykes beat at the door of his ear, but did not effect an entrance. Such hours are sweet and seldom return!

At last they arrived at their destination; the doors of the carriage were opened, and Elim roused himself; but when on getting out of the carriage, Jane's little hand grasped his own, when a soft voice murmured the words, "Here is your prison, Elim!" he would have sworn that van Naarvaersen's house, built as it was in the clumsy Flemish style, was the eighth wonder of the world.

To say truth, this house, which was built on the great square, very much resembled a house of cards.

An elevation, occupying the place of the usual flight of steps, extended the whole length of the building and supported a balcony which overshadowed the ground-floor. Although autumn was far advanced, the courtyard was clean and tidy; the walls, scrubbed with soap, shone like glass; the doors and windows were adorned with silver and bronze fastenings, and a wonderful neatness prevailed throughout.

Jane, running as lightly as a feather floating on the breeze, threw herself on the neck of her mother, a worthy and open-hearted Dutchwoman in the fullest sense of the word.

If ever you have seen, at the Hermitage Palace in St. Petersburg, the Amsterdam doll with which Peter the Great played in his childhood, you have seen Jane's mother; and yet this stout, homely little

woman was the most caressing creature in the world.

She took Elim by the hand and carried him off to inspect the apartments. The description of each rare article of furniture was a torture to him. The young man listened without hearing, and stared without seeing. After going through all the rooms, in which a mass of valuable things was heaped up, they came to the chamber containing the bed of state. The sight of this came as a magnificent dessert after a splendid dinner. Madame van Naarvaersen showed him with pride the covers embroidered by herself, the ancient lace, and the brocaded quilts, and immensely enjoyed his astonishment at the sight of the bridal bed, an enormous erection which seemed to have been made to be occupied not only by husband and wife, but by all their posterity as well. Piles of pillows, continually diminishing in size, seemed to ascend to the sky in a double pyramid; a canopy, adorned with lace like the clouds which accompany the transformation scenes in the theatre, reached from the sky to the ground, and a counterpane of white satin extended over the immense area of the bed, resembling, except in colour, the surface of an azure sea on a fine summer's day. The mortal who should venture to lie down in this bed suited to the gods would certainly incur the risk of being drowned in its feathery waves and billows of down. Doubtless this was the reason why Elim contented himself with merely looking at it.

After being initiated into all the mysteries of van Naarvaersen's house, Elim found rest at the dinner table from all his fatigues, and, after finishing the evening in merry fashion, fell asleep, perfectly contented with his lot.

CHAPTER IV

THE STAY

THE life of the inhabitants of Vlamhuis was exceedingly quiet and, we will even venture to say, exceedingly monotonous.

The master of the house was almost always busy in his factory, while the mistress, though she pretended to have

relinquished all the petty details of house-keeping, was, on the contrary, entirely given up to them.

Housekeeping was the sole passion the worthy woman had ever entertained.

Men, if one may judge by appearances, are created for a roving life; women, on the contrary, for a sedentary existence. They are called by nature to adorn household life.

The kitchen fire is the sun of the good housewife. You would not have doubted this truth for a moment had you seen Madame van Naarvaersen revolving round her fire like a planet and borrowing from it her light and brilliancy. You would have said that she understood the mute language of the broken vessel on which appeared the marks of long service. You might see there, as in another *Hôtel des Invalides*, a noseless teapot, a cup without arms, a coffee-pot without legs; but from all her cripples the intelligent mistress of the house continued to extract important services. As for condiments and the invention of new dishes, she was in no way inferior to the famous Vatel, though I doubt if she could have carried to such lengths as he did his despair at the delay in the arrival of the fish. Her gherkins, for example, celebrated for forty leagues round, were something wonderful. She had, besides, discovered, or rather invented, a preparation of fish which was not to be found in any cookery book hitherto published, the secret of which would only be confided to her daughter on her wedding-day.

The consequence was that, as Jane's mother spent all her time in the kitchen, while her father only came back to the house at dinner-time, Elim, seated close to Jane's embroidery frame, had abundant time for looking at and talking to her. This contemplation and conversation were uninterrupted except by some occasional reading of poetry, or when Elim amused himself during the girl's absence by drawing. In these intervals, which might very justly be called the unfolding of the play, Elim talked to her, with a warmth that was ardent enough to melt their snows, of the Russian winters, of the delights of sleighing, and of the lovely summer nights so well sung of by Pushkin, during which the sun appears never to leave the horizon.

And Jane would exclaim,—

"Oh, how I should love to see it all!"

"Why shouldn't you?" Elim would answer with a smile.

And he would look at her with an expression which completed the thought that was in her mind.

Jane would then lower her eyes with a deep sigh and resume her work.

Of what was she thinking at such times?

There was a time when I could have told you; but now I have quite forgotten what girls think about.

Elim, who was naturally amusing, and was now stimulated by the pleasure of giving pleasure, grew charming; but he had by his side a disposition even more gay and smiling than his own, and that was Jane's.

Educated at a French boarding-school, she possessed all the good qualities of a Frenchwoman coupled with the frankness of her own country; add to that a real beauty which expanded day by day, enhanced by all the charms of youthfulness.

This combination of attractions made Elim very thoughtful at times: it is true that the thoughtful mood was often sweeter than the merriment itself; but, as regards Jane, she was always merry. Love was to her as yet only a plaything; she knew neither its happiness nor its torture. Often her evenness of temper made Elim angry; but his anger succumbed quickly to Jane's bantering, and the two young people would begin to laugh again like two children.

A week of rainy weather passed in this way.

At last the sky cleared, and Jane proposed a walk in the garden, which was of the true Dutch type. The paths were strewn with fine bright sand; all the little mounds were tended like almond cakes; the trees were clipped hedge-wise, the bushes trimmed to resemble vases of flowers, columns, or fans. All the vegetable creation seemed to have passed beneath the joiner's plane.

Nothing had preserved its natural shape. There was a bridge on which two fowls could not have passed each other; there were flowers in steel, Chinamen in wood, sheltering themselves with parasols from the summer sun in the month of October; a sportsman aiming at a duck which, for twenty years, had had no thought of flying from the lake.

Observing a stork on a tower, Elim asked if it was not made of marble.

"Ah! Monsieur Elim," said Jane, laughing, "we are not quite heathens, and although this bird is the object of a kind of cult with us, as it was with the Egyptians, we do not yet build temples to it nor worship it as an idol."

"That is a pity; for Master Quenzius seems to me to have been created and sent into the world to be the priest of this household god, of whom he has both the nose and mouth."

"And what do you think of our garden?"

"It is very interesting; quite a museum of quaint things. What a misfortune that I cannot see it when it is green and filled with flowers!"

"You may console yourself for your loss: under the gardener's shears it is exactly the same, summer and winter; only perhaps it is even more doleful in summer. As to flowers, I will show you their domain, where they bloom like your northern beauties."

Jane opened the door of the greenhouse. A little turret through which they passed was filled with birds; behind a wire curtain hopped and flew a large number of rare birds. Some of them came and settled on Jane's fingers and ate sugar from her mouth.

Elim smiled at this idyllic picture.

"It is charming," said he; "but, after all, your guests are prisoners."

"What does it matter, if I make my guests blithe and happy? The poor creatures nearly all come from hot climates, and if I gave them their freedom they would inevitably perish."

"You are so kind, dear Jane, that you would make even a falcon forget his freedom."

"A falcon! thank you; it is not the custom nowadays for ladies to carry birds of prey at their wrists. No; I am afraid of falcons, both for myself and for my birds."

"You are wrong, Jane; a falcon when tamed is a delightful bird: with you, it would live on bonbons and caresses."

"Yes, only to fly away some fine day."

"No, to remain under your roof like a pigeon."

"That's a nice tale you are telling me, Elim. Do you think I believe that a falcon wears talons as a mere ornament? But let us leave the birds and go to the flowers—flowers are my father's favourite companions."

"The cultivation of flowers is an amusing occupation for old men, as a recollection of pleasures that are past; it is a useful lesson for young people."

"Yes, Mr. Philosopher; and I, too, wish that they would last longer. You want either to have a thousand hearts, or only one very cold one, to see flowers die."

"The flowers are happier than we, Jane; we die as they do, and they do not suffer like us."

"Yes, but to make up for it, they have not our pleasures, and I confess that I do not envy flowers their fate. You are a botanist, Elim?"

"Oh, I am merely an amateur, Jane. The names *bulbata*, *barbata*, *grandifolia*, *grandiflora*, are like the Arabic alphabet to me."

"And you do not blush to confess your ignorance when you are in the flower-temple of the most celebrated botanist in Holland?"

"Not only do I confess my ignorance, but I am not ashamed of it. I am like the nightingale of the Persian poets—I adore the rose, the white rose alone."

"That is not enough, Elim, and if you wish to win a lasting place in my father's estimation, you must be able to talk to him about the stems and leaves, the petals and the pistils of all the rare flowers."

"Your advice is law, Jane; I am prepared not only to hang on to the flowers like a bee, but to grow out of the ground myself like a flower, if you will water me with the scented water of your knowledge. It is only from Flora herself that I can learn the paths of her kingdom and the names of her subjects, male and female. Let us begin our lessons from to-day."

"Willingly. Look at this flower, for example; its name is *aster*."

"That means *star*," said Elim. "I, too, know two stars. The sky has none more clear or brilliant, and it is by their rays alone that I would guide my bark across the ocean."

"Ah! please don't talk about your ocean, which frightens me so, since you were nearly drowned, and let us come down from the sky, where we are not worthy to have our dwelling."

"Nothing easier, when the sky comes down to the earth."

"Oh! how confused your poetical similes are growing, Elim. Isn't that what is called *fustian* in plain English?"

Look, here is a relation of your much-loved rose—it is the moss-rose."

"Don't you think it looks rather chilly in its pelisse?"

"This is *Chinese fire*."

"Which burns only when in your hands."

"Here is a flower which, as the Indians assert, gives a cry when you pluck it from its stem."

"Probably it cries, 'Don't touch me.'"

"None of them can ever say that to me, for I have never done them any harm. Now, mind you don't fall asleep, for here is the whole poppy tribe."

"I'm not afraid of their putting me to sleep; I am too close to the antidote; and I say this from experience, for, when you say to me, 'Good night, Elim,' I have noticed that I have not slept the whole night."

"Poor Elim! now I understand why you dream so much during the day. But where did we leave off; was it at this tulip? Oh, no; you see your absent-mindedness is becoming infectious, my pupil. Let us pass on to this cactus, which flowers once a year, and that at night. Poor ephemeral creature, it lives for two hours, and then its leaves fall."

"Only two hours! but still, it *does* bloom; for two hours it delights the fair eyes which gaze at it. I would give years of my life in order to bloom and be loved for two hours."

And Elim looked passionately at Jane. Jane saw the look and lowered her eyes.

"It is dreadfully hot in here," she said, letting the wrap which surrounded her neck drop upon her shoulders, and opening the door of the green-house.

"Come," she went on, "let us repeat this first lesson and see what progress my pupil has made, and whether he is to be sent into the corner or allowed to play in the yard. So, to begin with, Monsieur Elim, be good enough to tell me the name of this flower," she asked, as she plucked a tuberose.

"I don't know," answered Elim, still gazing at her.

"But, good gracious! what *do* you know, then?" she cried.

"I know how to love, and love passionately!" said the young man, seizing her two hands.

"And what does 'love' mean?" asked Jane, with a simplicity which had no trace of affectation in it.

Suppose this question put by a woman of thirty, dear reader; it would be artifice rather than simplicity.

I have read in books and heard so many dissertations on the subject of love, that I am ready to say with Jane, "What does 'love' mean?"

Some say that love is synonymous with desire; others, that to love is to forget completely the material side of love. Some say there is no love without money; others, that the rich do not know the meaning of love. And it is all in vain for you, realistic philosophers, spiritualists, Epicureans, Platonists, and even lovers, to argue about love; the more you pile argument upon argument, the more perplexed will the question become.

Do not, then, be surprised, dear reader, at the perplexity into which this simple question threw our hero. He did not find a word to reply, but dropped his eyes to the flower which Jane held in her hand, and, without thinking what he was saying, replied,—

"It is a campanula."

Jane burst out laughing.

"Ah!" she said, "you are a terrible pupil, and I do not believe I can sow flowers in your memory any more than in the snow of St. Petersburg, of which you were telling me the other day."

"I confess, Jane, that I do not understand flowers except in a garland. A bird of paradise appears beautiful, but we do not need on that account to know its real name; we know that it comes from the sky, and that is all. Suppose, Jane, that neither of us knew the name of the rose, should we smell its scent any the less on that account?"

"True; but I think it would be better to smell the scent and at the same time to know the name of the flower. Campanulas have not leaves as large as this—look!"

Elim looked, and in order to see better, raised Jane's hand towards his eyes, lowering his eyes at the same time to her hand.

The result was that his face was about on the same level as the girl's, and, the half-open door of the green-house setting up a current of air, her hair, wafted by the breeze, brushed his face.

The young man raised his eyes and saw close before them Jane's blue eyes,

pink cheeks and fresh mouth, and felt her scented breath.

You know the electricity contained in a woman's hair. Elim had no strength to resist; he clasped her waist with his arm, and in a transport of passion and with a cry of love pressed his lips to Jane's, smothering her astonishment in a kiss.

Jane tore herself from his arms.

"Oh!" she cried, "I would not have believed you could behave so."

And bursting into tears she escaped from the green-house.

The young man remained where he was, motionless and confused, with arms outstretched.

A bomb exploding in his pocket would have alarmed him less than this unexpected severity, which really seemed somewhat incomprehensible.

CHAPTER V

THE MEANING OF LOVE

ELIM rubbed his eyes, thinking he must be under the influence of a dream. Why was Jane annoyed? what made her so angry?

"She did not appear so indifferent to me, all the same," he said to himself; "I thought she listened readily enough and answered to the language which my eyes spoke to her. True, the kiss which I gave her was unexpected, but her lips did not avoid mine. I could not possibly have been mistaken on that point."

Quite perturbed by anxiety, Elim entered the dining-room; but he sought in vain to meet Jane's glance.

Jane was in a sulk, and, when the culprit addressed her, contented herself with answering "yes" and "no."

Elim, however, persevered. The more Jane treated him with coolness, the more anxious was the young man to gain her forgiveness.

At last he resolved to follow her example, and withdraw to his own chamber, quite determined not to appear either for tea or for supper.

"I really never saw anything like it," he said to himself as he strode backwards and forwards. "So young and at the same time so changeable! Changeable,

do I say? worse than that, unkind! What a blessing that I am not in love with her."

At these words he sighed.

"It is true she is beautiful; as far as that goes, there is nothing to be said: she is made like a Venus and is pure as the day; but what a disposition! a regular serpent— Yes, yes, Miss Jane, all is over between us, I warrant you, and now you may flirt with Quenzius, if it amuses you to do so."

The door of Elim's room opened, and the servant appeared.

"Will you have tea, sir?" he asked.

"Eh! what?" said Elim, who had neither heard nor understood.

"I asked if you would come and take tea, sir," repeated the servant.

"I am coming this very moment," answered the young man— "Well, yes," said he when the servant had gone out, "I am coming, but I will take no more notice of her than if she were not present."

And carrying his intention into effect, Elim entered the drawing-room with a cheerful air, and, instead of going to sit by Jane as usual, seated himself near Mynheer August and began to laugh and chat with him.

But Jane, who formerly interested herself in all that Elim said or did, did not even appear to notice his presence.

More than this; she seemed to have forgotten all Elim's likes and dislikes. He detested tea with sugar, and she put three lumps in his cup: she offered him cream, though it was a matter of public notoriety that he took his tea with a slice of lemon.

The young man was furious. Jane seemed to him a little monster; it is true that she was the prettiest little monster in the world. Elim's exasperation was so great that he was capable of two alternatives—either of falling out with her for the rest of his life, or of taking her in his arms before her father and mother and pressing her to his heart.

I have often asked myself which is the sweetest to two lovers, their first kiss, or their first quarrel; but when the two things come together, it is enough to drive you mad.

Elim went back to his room choking with rage. Had he known by heart the soliloquy of Figaro, he would have recited it from beginning to end; but as he

did not know it, he contented himself with exclaiming,—

"Oh! women, women!"

For fear lest he should be induced to go back to the drawing-room, Elim undressed and went to bed, biting his nails.

At midnight he was still tossing from side to side on his bed, without having discovered anything else to say but the eternal exclamation,—

"Oh! women, women!"

At last, at about two in the morning, he fell asleep.

What happened to him during his sleep? By what dreadful nightmare was he beset? I know not; but, as a matter of fact, he awoke to find himself on the floor.

He plunged into his bath and dressed; then, not feeling sufficiently refreshed, he went down to the garden in order to collect his wits for another interview.

Without knowing why, he went up to the doors of the green-house: there he met the gardener, who had a watering-pot in his hand and a pipe in his mouth.

"There is nobody in there?" asked Elim, wishing to make some remark to the man.

"What! nobody, sir?" said he. "Why, there are more than a thousand flowers and a hundred birds."

"Old joker!" said Elim, entering the green-house and closing the door behind him.

"Zoo! zoo!" murmured the Dutchman with a shake of his head; and he went off smiling to himself.

Elim, on entering the green-house, went involuntarily up to the group of tuberose near which he had been so happy and then so miserable the day before. His soul floated in the perfume of the flowers like the Indian peri. The scented atmosphere seemed to take possession of him; it penetrated every pore, and filled him with an irresistible sadness.

"How strange it is!" he murmured: "I have never before been at once so happy and so miserable."

He sat down on a bench surrounded by roses, and feeling the sweet sadness intoxicate him more and more, he did not try to combat it, but let his head fall between his hands.

Then his heart, big with sighs, unburdened itself; those tears so sweet that you

retain them in your breast as long as possible rose to his eyes. He felt them trickle between his fingers, and, having no longer strength or will to hold them in, he murmured in his softest tones, as though speaking to himself,—

"Jane, my beloved Jane!"

At this moment he seemed to hear a gentle noise at his side, like the flutter of a bird.

He raised his face, all bathed in tears, and uttered a cry.

Jane was standing before him.

He opened his arms and repeated,—

"Jane! my beloved Jane!"

The girl fell upon his breast.

"Oh!" said he after an interval—so powerless is man in the presence of happiness—"Jane, Jane, how you have hurt me!"

This time it was Jane who smilingly offered him her rosy and innocent lips. Elim, as though he dreaded lest she should escape from him again, clasped her with both hands round the head, and once again the lips of the two lovers met.

Jane pushed Elim gently from her.

"Why do you push me away, Jane?" he asked.

"I don't know," answered the girl; "it is not I who push you away, Elim; it is not my heart, it is my hands. Naughty hands! take hold of them, they will not push you away any more."

Elim seized them and covered them with kisses.

Both spoke at once, each looked at the other; they laughed, without knowing what made them laugh. They "thee'd" and "thou'd" each other, though which of them began it they would have been puzzled to say.

"What was the matter with you yesterday, naughty girl?" asked Elim.

"I don't know: I ran away without knowing why. It seemed as though you had scorched my lips with a hot iron."

"But afterwards? in the evening?" asked the young man.

"I wanted to tease you," said Jane, playing with his hair; "but, to tell the truth, it was myself whom I teased; I could not sleep, and was calling to you the whole night."

"Yesterday you asked me what love was, Jane."

"Is that love? In that case, it hurts a good deal—but yet it is very sweet."

"You capricious child!" cried Elim.

"Oh! don't be angry, Elim. You frighten me when you are angry; you frighten me so much that, when I saw you coming, I hid behind this seat, and that is exactly where you came and sat down. Then I looked through the branches and saw you holding your head in your hands; I wanted to seize the opportunity to escape on tiptoe; but, all of a sudden, I thought you were crying, and then I couldn't take another step. You know the fable of Daphné turned into a laurel; I looked hurriedly to see if I were not growing into branches. And at that moment you said, 'Jane, my beloved Jane!' I felt my heart melt. You raised your head and your face was wet with tears. I thought I was going to choke, and, if you had not opened your arms to receive me, I should have fallen fainting to the ground. Ah! why do I love you so?"

"Is it the first time you have loved?"

The girl laid her hand upon her heart.

"Yes, and it will be the last," she said; "and you?"

"Oh! for me," cried Elim, "it is not enough for me to love you in this world, I want to love you in the next world also."

Jane did not ask again the meaning of the word "love."

The gardener entered; he had come to water the flowers.

Our young lovers separated, each saying to the other,—

"For ever! for ever!"

Then they went out, Elim by one door, Jane by the other, and so back to their own rooms to enjoy their happiness in peace.

CHAPTER VI

THE BRINGER OF NEWS

EVERY day, in the morning, Elim left his room and paid a visit to the green-house.

Jane, on her part, did not fail to go there; had she needed an excuse, she could have given two:—

The watering of the flowers, and the feeding of her birds.

But there was some one who had become far dearer to her than all the

flowers in the world and all the birds of the air.

The lovers would run to meet each other and embrace; then they talked and embraced again.

Which should give the other the most kisses was the arithmetical problem which they had set themselves to solve, and for the first time an arithmetical problem became amusing.

Lost in Jane's green-house as in a second garden of Armida, our lieutenant forgot the sea, forgot the fleet, forgot his friends, forgot his foes. Keen patriot though he was, he lost sight of the fact that the French had reached the heart of his own country, or, if it occurred to him, he said to himself,—

"No, Russia will not fall, Napoleon will slip on the blood of our countrymen; at any rate, such a war cannot last long."

Then he put to himself this question, which brought its own answer,—

"Besides, what can I do?"

Love also is a despot and a winner of victories; it suppresses and enchains all other sentiments. The morrow had ceased to have any existence for Elim; he lived for the present day, and felt so happy in living thus that he had only one fear, namely, that some change should happen to his present mode of existence.

He could no longer call his soul his own; he had given it away.

As for Jane, she also experienced the bitter sweet of love. She felt oppressed, she remained with eyes closed; her half-opened mouth murmured low,—

"Elim! Elim! Elim!"

One day she found herself, amid her flowers, embroidering a whole piece of material with E's; in her drawing-book she outlined a young man's head.

"What is that head you are drawing?" asked her mother, who was looking over her shoulder.

Jane started; she did not know her mother was so near.

"The head of Julius Cæsar," she said.

The worthy Dutchwoman did not know who Julius Cæsar was, but she asked no further question.

At the time when Jane was accustomed to help her mother with the household work she was suddenly seized with a desire to dance; at the times when she ought to have been practising on the

piano she wanted to pray. Sometimes she forgot her keys on a seat in the garden and had to hunt for an hour or two before finding them; sometimes she put salt instead of sugar in the pastry, and, as it was Jane who had made this pastry, Elim maintained that it was excellent. One day—an accident more terrible than if some planet had threatened the earth with destruction—she left a chair in the middle of the floor, thereby disturbing all the harmony of the drawing-room. Finally, when she gave him his coffee without any sugar, Mynheer August perceived that his daughter was losing her head, and one day when she plucked a tulip, a specimen of its kind unique in the whole of Holland, he thought seriously of taking her to task for her folly.

"*Saperloot!*" he cried, opening his eyes as wide as folding doors, "this certainly means something."

But he remained with his eyes wide open, and those eyes saw absolutely nothing.

Elim had already been at the factory for three weeks without the least thought of going away. The old man, on his part, was delighted with his company and had forgotten that he was not a member of the family. As for the excellent mistress of the house, she had grown as accustomed to Elim as to some old piece of furniture given her at her marriage, and, provided he was found in his usual place, that is to say, by Jane's side, she took no more notice of him than of a cupboard or sideboard.

Added to all this, the winter rendered the navigation of the Zuyder-Zee impossible; so that everything seemed to accord with the wishes of our hero.

On the morning of November 1st, Elim repaired to the green-house as usual.

There he found Jane in tears.

He questioned her; but, without answering his questions, she went on crying.

"Ah!" she said at last, "my happiness is over, Elim; you are going to leave me."

"What a foolish idea, dear Jane! Leave you, when I love you more than ever!"

"Ah! if you loved me less, I should find some consolation in being angry: I should call you traitor and ungrateful, and that would console me. Oh! I am

much more unhappy at losing you when you are not to blame than I should be if you were."

"Don't worry yourself about troubles to come; of course we must separate some day; but when?"

"Why did I love you, Elim?" cried the girl, throwing herself into his arms and overcome with tears.

"But I don't understand, Jane dear; in heaven's name explain yourself."

"Listen, this is what has happened; my father has engaged some fishermen to take you back to your ship, and you are going away to-morrow night."

Elim, as though thunderstruck by the dreadful news, remained in front of the girl pale and motionless. At last he remembered that he was a man, and that consequently the part of comforter belonged to him.

"Hush, hush, Elim! I do not want to be comforted. I feel that, if I were with you, even in the tiniest boat, I should not be afraid of the most angry sea; but when I think of you alone amidst strangers in the tempest, the mere thought of it kills me. Not to mention that you are going to England and from there to Russia, and, once in Russia, you will think no more of your poor Jane. What am I saying—you will think of her no more? Yes, you *will* think of her, but only to laugh at her folly and her love."

Her voice was drowned in sobs.

Elim, on his part, could not restrain his tears; but at last, though still weeping himself, he succeeded in calming her a little.

"Listen," he said, "I will ask for an interview with your father; I will tell him that I love you, and that you love me, that we cannot live if parted. When he is quite convinced that we are telling him the truth, he will give his consent. And then the war will not last for ever, as our love will: one day things will change. Come, look; just now the sky was so dark that it seemed to herald the day of doom, and now the sun is shining brightly. His rays are sent by God as an omen of comfort to us."

Jane smiled sadly. The sun's rays made two tears gleam in her eyes like liquid diamonds; Elim reverently kissed them away, and then both of them, raising their eyes to heaven, exclaimed together, "God is good!"

At this moment the bell rang for breakfast.

The young people came in, as usual by different doors.

Mynheer van Naarvaersen, thrusting his hands into his pockets, told Elim all about his business, what he had bought and sold, and what his profits had been for the month of October. Quenzius, contemplating a picture on the wall which represented a meal, sounded a flourish on his nose, like that of a trumpet, which might be termed the bugle-call for breakfast. Jane looked sadly at the lieutenant. Madame van Naarvaersen had just entered the dining-room, her cheeks still red from cooking, when Quenzius, who was looking out of the window, exclaimed,—

"Hallo! there is that chatterbox Montane coming to pay us a visit."

"Good gracious! Captain Montane!" cried the mistress of the house in alarm; "what are you talking about, Quenzius?"

"It is a judgment from Heaven!" cried Mynheer August in despair.

"It is a disaster!" repeated Madame van Naarvaersen.

"He is more dreadful to me than the drum, and Heaven knows there is nothing I hate so much as the noise of the drum," said Mynheer August.

"I hate him worse than flies," said his wife.

"He will break down all my tulips with his boots."

"And tear all my carpets with his spurs."

But what was to be done? Living, as they did, in the country, there was no means of declining to receive visitors.

The enemy was already on the steps.

In short, the visitor who had been preceded by this chorus of imprecations came in with a waddling gait and singing,—

"The French they love the dance
In a way I can't express;
And the secret they possess
Of setting things to dancing measure
I will believe,
When I perceive
These doughty conquerors of Nations
Making Kings and populations
Dance and caper at their pleasure."

The doors opened and Captain Custom-house - officer Coast - guard Montane Lassade, native of the neighbourhood of Bordeaux and transplanted from the

moors of Mont-de-Marsan to the swamps of Holland, entered.

He was a man of five or six-and-thirty, with the eyes of a rabbit, the beak of a cuckoo, and an assurance which smacked of the Gulf of Gascony a mile off.

He wore a blue uniform with plain epaulettes, and carried a slender sword that resembled a probe.

"Upon my word," said he, bowing to the company, "there are good reasons for saying, *Monsieur Narvarsan*"—the captain had turned the name of the worthy Dutchman into French—"there are good reasons for saying that the road to Paradise is difficult. Your Vlamis"—he had Frenchified the name of the estate as well as that of its owner—"your Vlamis is a regular Paradise; a Mahomet's paradise, I mean," he added, looking at the girl, "inasmuch as Miss Jane herself is worth all the houris put together."

Delighted with the compliment which he had paid, he shook his hat, which was wet with rain, and sprinkled everybody.

"You are so polite," said Jane, wiping off with her handkerchief the water with which she was covered, "that it is not possible to receive you and your compliments drily."

"You are divine, Miss Jane!" replied the Gascon; "but guess, if you can, what I have brought you; a pretty pattern for a scalloped collar, with doves perching upon hearts: it is charming. And for you, Madame Narvarsan, a receipt for keeping the colour of preserved rose-leaves."

"It would have been much better if you had brought a receipt for preserving carpets from damp," said Madame de Naarvaersen, as she saw with alarm the water continuing to drip from the custom-house officer's hat like a fountain.

"The captain is the friend of the ladies, or else the ladies are very ungrateful," said Mynheer August, laying his hand on the shoulder of the new arrival; "he has always a present for them in his pocket and a compliment in his head."

"By St. Barbe!" said the captain, with a movement of his neck in his cravat and a twitch of the mouth which was habitual to him, "my heart is always as ready to fall at the feet of the fair as my sword to encounter the steel of the enemy."

"Which will have the most work, Captain, your heart or your sword?" said Mynheer August, laughing: "we have plenty of beauties in Amsterdam and Rotterdam, but also plenty of barrels to probe at the frontier."

"I am overwhelmed with business," replied the custom-house officer, appearing not to understand Mynheer August's joke, and accompanying his answer with his customary twitch; "your compatriots, instead of being grateful to our Emperor, who has refrained from pushing Holland into the sea when he could do it so easily, are holding conventicles in all the inns in order to carry on a correspondence with those damned Russians and confounded English, who are planning a descent upon the coast. A plot has just been discovered, having for its object no less than the handing over to them of the fortress and the harbour. Quite a trifle! Luckily, dear Mynheer August, with my customary keenness of scent, I have found out the secret quite simply and saved the town. You see before you, Mynheer August, a man who ought to have triumphal arches erected in his honour. The traitors have been seized, and where? Just guess. Like Ali Baba's forty thieves, in casks of wine."

"Well, I vote that they erect for you, in front of the principal gate of the town, a statue whose pedestal shall be an enormous barrel. But won't you breakfast with us, Captain Montane? Coffee should be drunk, as iron is struck, as hot as possible."

"Willingly, willingly, Mynheer Narvarsan," said the captain with his habitual movement of the neck.

And he offered his arm gallantly to the mistress of the house, while Elim, according to his custom, gave his to Jane. Mynheer August and Quenzius brought up the rear.

The captain seated himself at the table.

"And what news is there," asked Mynheer August, "besides that of the plot about which you have just told us?"

"The news is, that our little Corporal—if I may say it without offence—sends us every week the keys of some capital. We have received the keys of Moscow, and we are at this moment expecting those of St. Petersburg. The ladies of Russia have already ordered thirty thousand pairs of shoes for the ball that will

be given at the Palace of the Hermitage. What a wonderful country Russia is! if you only knew it!"

"Were you ever in it, sir?" asked Elim.

"No; but I have a brother who wanted to go there. Just fancy; the ordinary hail, which we call sleet, falls from the sky there as large as hens' eggs; which is a dispensation of Providence, since these hail-stones are kept and serve to cool the wine in summer. What is more curious still, is that they use for climbing the mountains—you know that Russia is a land of mountains?"

"No," said Elim, "I did not know it."

"Well, sir, then I tell you of the fact. I was saying that for climbing the mountains they employ small horses called *lochaks*, which probably means *cats*, since they are no larger than dogs."

"I am only afraid of one thing," said Elim, "and that is that your countrymen will find nothing to eat in a country already poor, and which, according to report at least, had been ravaged beforehand."

"A mere trifle!" replied the captain. "What are the frosts of Russia to our grenadiers, who, when crossing the St. Bernard, devoured ice? It is true that they did this in order to descend into Italy, that beautiful Italy which has no rival but Spain, with her orange-groves, her forests of oleander and her bowers of China roses. Ah! Mynheer *Narvarsan*, that is where you ought to have a country-house, between Grenada and Seville, on the banks of the Guadalquivir, beneath the shadow of the Sierra Morena!"

"Judging from the way in which you speak of the woods and forests of Spain," said Elim, laughing, "it is easy to see that you have been in that country."

"No, sir, but I had an uncle who used to get his tobacco from there."

Elim shook his head.

"The difficulty is not to get into Russia," said he, "but to get out of it again."

"How is that?"

"Because there are two dread sentinels that guard the gates of Russia—hunger and cold."

The custom-house officer burst out laughing.

"Oh! as to that," said he, "you are very kind, but you need not be uneasy:

our troops are followed by immense flocks, of merino sheep."

"Would the Emperor wish to establish cloth factories in Russia?" asked Mynheer August.

"No," answered the captain, "and we have enough of those, thank God, in Holland. No; our soldiers eat the sheep, and as soon as a sheep is eaten, a pelisse is made of its skin; and besides, now that we are at Moscow—"

"At Moscow!" cried Elim, springing from his chair.

"Yes, certainly, at Moscow. Didn't you hear me announce just now that we had received the keys of the city?"

"I thought you were joking, sir; but to some jokes there is a limit."

"A mere trifle!"—it was the captain's favourite expression—"But you must have come from under ground, sir, if you have yet to be told this news when all the mutes of Peking are already talking of it."

Van Naarvaersen had not wished to distress Elim by the news of the capture of Moscow; but when the young man fastened on him a look of inquiry, he was compelled to admit the truth.

"Yes," he said in German, "Moscow is taken, it is true; but the Russians are brave, and winter is coming on. Keep cool, Elim, keep cool!"

To ask Elim to be cool on hearing such news was to ask what was impossible.

Montane continued,—

"Yes, sir; and before arriving at Moscow, we defeated a little army of some five hundred thousand men commanded by Souvarof, Korsakof, and Koutosof—perhaps I have not got these crack-jaw names quite right. Russia had mustered all the men she could scrape together; she had formed a regiment of sappers, the youngest of whom was ninety, and whose beards came down to their knees. These beards rendered cuirasses quite unnecessary, for the bullets were flattened against them as though they were targets. By noon all was over, and at two o'clock Napoleon entered Moscow, borne aloft on the arms of noblemen, according to the Russian custom. At the gate of Kalouga, a loaf was presented to him as high as the Canigon, and, on a silver dish, a small whale about five and twenty feet long, which had been caught in the White Sea."

"Do you know where the White Sea is, sir?"

"Between the Black and Red Seas, sir."

"It is nearly a thousand miles from Moscow."

"You mean that it was at that distance in the time of Peter the Great, perhaps. Possibly it was. But, for the benefit of Moscow, the Emperor, who intends to spend the winter there and give some grand fêtes, has blown it nearer with his cannon. In the evening he gave a ball, and all the bells in Moscow were set ringing; there are twelve thousand of them, so this music produced a fine effect. Two squadrons of Cossacks that had been captured the day before danced the galop with great success; all the windows in the city were illuminated at night, and the inhabitants were so delighted that, in their enthusiasm, they set fire to five hundred houses, and three-fourths of the town was burned to the ground."

"If they did that," said Elim, "it was in order that all the French might perish in the conflagration."

As he finished speaking, the servant entered with the English newspapers.

They announced the retreat of the French.

Van Naarvaersen read the news first, then, handing the paper to Elim, said in German,—

"Moscow is in ruins, but Russia is saved; the French have retreated from the town."

Elim read the paper and passed it to the custom-house officer.

"I do not know English," said the latter.

"Well, sir," said Elim, "I do not wish to tell you bad news; ask some one who knows English to translate those ten lines for you."

And rising from the table, lest any fresh bragging on the part of the Gascon should make him break through the restraint which he had placed upon himself, he withdrew to his own room.

Hardly had Elim gone out when Captain Montane, with an air of mystery, requested Mynheer August to give him a private interview on a matter of the greatest importance.

Mynheer August motioned to his wife and daughter, who left the room together with Quenzius, leaving August alone with the captain.

CHAPTER VII

AN OFFER OF MARRIAGE

WHAT was the affair of such great importance which Captain Montane had to communicate in private to Mynheer August?

History remains silent on this point, and, until further orders, we are compelled to restrict ourselves to conjectures.

All we can say is, that after a quarter of an hour, the door of the dining-room, which had been hermetically sealed in the interval, was flung open violently, and the captain came out purple with rage and tugging at his moustaches, while Mynheer August van Naarvaersen said to him in his gentlest tones and accompanying the words with several bows,—

"The nose, my dear Monsieur Montane, is a great encumbrance. *Saperloot!* an ell is all right, or even two ells; but two and a half ells, that is too much of a good thing!"

The captain crossed the drawing-room without looking at or saying a word to Madame August, who was playing piquet with Quenzius, or to Jane, who was talking to Elim.

When he reached the steps, however, he was heard to mutter,—

"Ah! Monsieur Narvarsan, I will pay you out for this!"

A moment later the sound of two horses' feet was heard, and the custom-house officer was seen galloping away.

Not understanding the reason for this abrupt departure, Jane and Elim rose and went to find Mynheer August in his study.

Contrary to his custom, Mynheer August appeared greatly disturbed; he was walking rapidly up and down the room. It was easy to see that he was under the influence of some unusual emotion.

But, on seeing his pretty Jane, his face brightened.

He took her by the hand and kissed her.

"You don't want to leave your father, my child, do you?"

"Why do you ask me that?" said Jane timidly.

"Because, my dear, a sad thought has crossed my mind. I remember that I

have seen in the spring the young swallows, scarcely fledged, that had left their nest. They were caught by school-boys. Daughters, my poor Jane, are like swallows."

"I don't know what you mean, father; but I have never wanted to leave you. I don't want to leave you now—"

Jane hesitated; then, recovering her courage, she added,—

"Promise to grant me what I am going to ask you."

"All right, dear, I understand; you want some jewellery, a ring, a necklace. Tell me what it is, you know I refuse you nothing."

"Oh! father, I have so much jewellery already that I want nothing of that sort. But you won't be angry, father, will you?"

"I shall be angry if you don't tell me at once what you want. Is it a dancing-master? You shall have M. Saint-Leger, a pupil of Vestris, who can dance a gavotte on the neck of a bottle."

"You will keep on joking, father, but I want to talk to you seriously."

"Seriously! You? Bless me! I am curious to know what serious matter you can have got in your head."

"But in my heart, father—"

Mynheer August looked at Jane.

"Yes, we—I—Elim—" she stammered.

"Ah! yes, the dear Elim, my poor friend! Do you know," he continued, addressing the young man, "that we must soon part from you?"

"That is just why I have come to rout you out in your study, my worthy sir. Yes, we must either part for ever, or else for a very short time. I won't make you a long speech; neither you nor I like roundabout methods. I love your daughter, and Jane loves me; your consent will make us happy. Say 'Yes,' and I will leave you; and when the war is over I will come back and say to you, 'Dear father, give me Jane.'"

"Jane! give you Jane! Jane get married!" cried Mynheer August, taking three steps backward. "*Saperloot!* that is short and to the point, Elim. Why! there is a regular rage, a sort of epidemic, to-day; everybody wants to marry Jane. I have only just sent Montane away, and now another suitor presents himself with the same story."

"I hope, my dear Mynheer van Naarvaersen," said Elim, laughing, "that you

don't class me in quite the same category as Captain Montane."

"*Saperloot!* God forbid, my dear fellow!"

"My worthy friend, I should never have ventured to ask you for Jane's hand if I had not a certain claim to her—first of all, her love for me, and next my desire to make her happy."

"Father, dear," said Jane in her turn, throwing herself on the old man's neck, "I love Elim with all my heart."

"Come, my little girl, no folly," interrupted Mynheer August, "what do you know about your heart, I wonder? Children, when they play with their dolls, often say, 'I love,' without knowing what they mean. I am surprised, however, that you should have given your love to a stranger without saying a word about it to your father or your mother. Just think, you are not sixteen yet! As for you, Elim, I do not blame you, and you have a two-fold motive for falling in love with a pretty girl and a rich heiress."

Elim gave a start which indicated that August's words had stung him as deeply as if he had received a wound.

"Van Naarvaersen," said he, "you can refuse to show me kindness, but you have no right to withhold your respect from me. I have, in Russia, a competent estate and an unblemished reputation, nor have I ever said or done anything which could lead you to think that I am a mere adventurer. I have no need of your wealth, and have enough for both of us. Give me Jane, just as she is. I ask for nothing with her, except her love and your approval."

"Your thoughts and your words are honourable, young man: I have only known you for three weeks; I will not insult you by any suspicion. I believe your word; but remember that it is very risky to offer your hand when your very life is in such peril. Montane suspects something. It is your own fault, for you were not able to restrain yourself. He will lose no time in denouncing me to his government, who detest me. For my own part, I am thinking of leaving Holland. In whichever direction our sympathies may lie, the fact remains that we are at war with Russia, and God alone knows when this war will end, and even if it should end soon, again God alone knows when you will be able to return. Moreover, consider how dearly it costs

a father and mother to part with their child."

"I will pay you a visit every year, I give you my word. More than that; I am alone in the world, and my own master; I will live with you if you desire it."

"No, my dear Elim, no," said the old man, shaking his head. "The Bible says that the wife must forsake all and follow her husband; but it does not say that a husband should forsake his country for his wife. I must admit that I like you very much, Elim, and were you a Dutchman, I would take you as my son-in-law at once, even if you had not a ducat in your purse. But to let my daughter go so far away from me, she so young and you so fickle!—Who knows! perhaps before six months were over, you might be tired of each other."

"Had we never met in this world, Mynheer August, I should have said, if I had met Jane in the next, 'That is the woman of my heart—'"

"Anyhow, father, I will say one thing," added Jane; "and that is, that I will never marry any one but Elim."

"All this is very serious, my dear child; you speak from excitement, and excitement is a malady which soon passes off. I am quite ready to believe that your love is enduring, and that neither time nor dangers will get the better of it. We are now about to part. Listen to me, Elim: if you come back in the same frame of mind, and if you find Jane's feelings unchanged, why then God bless you both! I will never stand in the way of my child's happiness. During the interval, our knowledge of one another will grow deeper; Jane will grow older, and in so doing, she will become more serious-minded."

"May we depend on your word, father, and exchange rings?"

"As far as my word goes, you may build a castle upon it; but, as regards exchanging rings, I think nothing can be more unnecessary. You are a sailor and engaged in war, you may be killed or perish in a storm, and then Jane would be a widow without having been a wife."

"My worthy friend," said Elim, "I am neither appealing to custom nor asking for an engagement; it is only for a consolation to our hearts. Give me the right to count myself as belonging to your family, give me the right to call Jane my fiancée, to call you my father."

Elim knelt down before the old man.

"Father," said Jane, "have pity on us; make your children happy."

"There!" cried the old man brushing away the tears from his eyes, haven't you finished, *saperloot!* Get up, and be comforted and embrace each other; but don't insist on more, if you don't want me to refuse you everything. I must show common-sense for you, since you do not show it for yourselves. To-morrow you part; but you can part saying that the future depends upon yourselves. Now, leave me in peace, and give me time to collect my thoughts."

To Elim it seemed as though this consent almost amounted to a refusal, but what could he do? He kissed the old man's hand, while Jane embraced him, half caressingly, half sulkily, and both left the room slowly and sadly.

Meanwhile, our custom-house captain was on his way back to the town, anathematizing everything that he came across. Being but a poor rider, he bumped terribly in the saddle, which movement added no little to his bad temper. His companion, a soldier of the marines, and a native of Bordeaux like himself, followed him on a lean horse, smoking a short pipe, and remarking, "Confound the brutes!" every time the captain gave a jolt, with regularity, never varying.

"Both men and horses, Cabaret"—this was the man's name, a name evidently bestowed on him on account of the frequency with which he visited the establishments consecrated to the god of wine—"both men and horses, water and land, air and sky, everything is disgusting in this land of fogs. Twelve hundred bombs! If it only wanted a sign from me to burst in their dykes, they would precious soon be submerged."

"I quite agree with you, Captain," replied Cabaret.

And, the captain being once more jolted about a foot from his saddle,—

"Confound the brutes!" said Cabaret, who was scarcely a better horseman than his companion.

"I will tell you my opinion, and a candid opinion too. What are the men here? Clumsy tradesmen. The women? Nothing but cooks. And the girls? Milk-jugs. No education, no manners. A piece of Limburg cheese is more

acceptable to them than the love of a gentleman."

"Ecod! I quite agree with you, Captain—Confound the brutes!"

"So I would rather marry the widow of the devil himself than wed that girl. The fool of a Dutchman was quite taken in; he thought I was asking for his daughter seriously! he did not see that I was laughing at him when I made my proposal."

"The fact is, Captain, that while I was waiting at the door I was cudgelling my brains to discover what on earth you could be about, to marry such a tulip as that!"

"And how do you think the old wretch received my proposal?" said the captain.

"I trust he threw himself on your neck, Captain, with open arms and open purse."

"Ha! ha!" said the captain with a very forced laugh, "just think of it; he refused me!"

"Refused you! you are joking, Captain."

"No, Cabaret, what I am telling you is gospel truth. He considers himself a great nobleman, because he walks on velvet carpets and has bronze candelabra on his table. A fine idea! Why, if he could cover all Europe with his cloth, and pave the whole Zuyder-Zee with his gold, I wouldn't take his minx of a daughter. What is more," he added with a frown as he bit his moustache, "in spite of all his wealth, I can ruin him."

"I quite agree with you, Captain. If you can do so, you must; but it is not easy to get your teeth into these damned Dutchmen."

"In the first place, Cabaret, he reads the English newspapers: in the second, he is a Jew: in the third, he is—he is—"

The captain searched vainly to discover what Mynheer August was in the third place: this, however, did not deter Cabaret from replying,—

"I quite agree with you,"

Or from adding,—

"Not to mention that he has got some men with him—ahem!"

"Some men?" repeated Montane.

"Yes, of whom I am suspicious," said Cabaret.

"What men?" asked Montane, whose eyes lighted up at the expectation of hearing something which might com-

promise the cloth manufacturer. "Come, of whom are you speaking?"

"Well, Captain, about three weeks ago I was on patrol with some of my comrades—Confound the brutes!"

"I know what *you* call going on patrol; the Emperor does not like marauders."

"That's good! Each man takes what he can; one man takes a city, another rifles a strong-box."

"And you're the man who rifles strong-boxes, are you, booby? Be careful! The man who takes cities gains a crown, whereas he who plunders coffers sometimes meets with nothing but a halter. But this is your business and not mine. What men are you talking about, Cabaret?"

"Well, while I was on patrol, I saw half a dozen men who had gone into this manufacturer's mill, and such men! regular ruffians: I should not like to have met them on my road—Confound the brutes!"

"And how did you manage to see them?"

"By looking through the window; you see, Captain, I am naturally inquisitive; that is one of my defects."

"Did you fancy this, or did you really see them?"

"I really saw them; armed to the teeth, Captain, and with beards!—beards to which those of the sappers of the Old Guard are a mere trifle—and the lingo they jabbered! it is ringing in my ears even now."

"They were probably English runners."

"The English do not wear beards, Captain."

"True."

"Suddenly their leader discovered me and fired at me with a pistol as long as a duck-gun and as big as a blunderbuss."

"And what did you do, Cabaret?"

"Ecod! I ran away, Captain."

"And what happened next?"

"Next? Look here; listen carefully to the rest of my story, for it is the most interesting part of it."

"I am listening."

"To-day, while you were having your breakfast in the dining-room, I had mine in the kitchen, close to the fire, since in this confounded climate you may roast yourself without getting warm. Presently Mynheer August's nephew came in to light his cigar. I raised my head and

recognised—guess whom I recognised, Captain."

"Mynheer August's nephew, I suppose."

"Yes, indeed, and the leader of my bandits!"

"Cabaret!"

"Devil take me if it is not true, Captain."

"Ah! my dear Cabaret, if only you were sure of what you were saying!"

"But it is as true as truth itself. As for the other five, I am told that—"

Cabaret lowered his voice.

"They are shut up in the factory. The old man declares they are mechanics—mechanics who coin false money, I should say! No wonder the old scoundrel is so rich."

"Unquestionably, I am a man of genius, Cabaret!"

"I quite agree, Captain, but in what respect?"

"For having seen at once that this young man was an enemy of France. You are certain of what you say, Cabaret?"

"Morally certain, Captain."

"Morally or immorally, it's all one to me, so long as you are certain."

"I am certain."

"Very well, then, to-morrow I will denounce the old rascal to the police. Aha! the crime of high treason, August *Narvarsan*, is no trifle."

As they were now entering the town, Captain Montane motioned to Cabaret to be silent, an invitation which the son of the Garonne obeyed, contenting himself with occasionally breaking the silence by saying, "Confound the brutes!"

CHAPTER VIII

AN ACT OF TREACHERY

THE very next day Colonel van Waan, the commandant of Flushing, gave orders for the arrest of Mynheer August van Naarvaersen, and appointed an officer and twelve men to carry out his decree.

Chance—the author of all the good and likewise of all the mischief that occurs in the world—miraculously threw Captain Montane across the path of the tall and lean Quenzius, who was walking by the side of the canal.

A man in sailor's dress was following him with a line under his arm.

Montane stopped.

The nose of a custom-house officer, especially when it has attained the size which Montane's nose had reached, is the keenest and most sensitive instrument in the world.

At the time when civilization was in its infancy, men employed the hazel-wand for the discovery of treasure; in our own days this mysterious rod has been superseded by the custom-house officer's nose. These officers scent their prey with more keenness than the crow scents corpses, and contraband goods cannot escape them even though hidden in the stomach of a Pantagruel or a Gargantua.

"There is something at the bottom of this," said the captain. "Humph! humph! Quenzius out of doors and away from his ledgers!—"

And he sniffed the air more emphatically than before.

"The fisherman accompanying him is a very clever dog; I have seen him two or three times catch fish as big as my arm. That is not natural for a fisherman to do. He has a parcel in his handkerchief; what the deuce can there be in that parcel?"

And Captain Montane, quickening his pace, pulled Quenzius by his cloak.

Quenzius had pretended all along not to have seen Montane; he now pretended not to feel him. But Montane pulled so violently that Quenzius was obliged to turn round.

"Ah! is it you, Monsieur Montane?" said he, smiling. "Delighted to see you!"

"The same to you, Monsieur Quenzius."

Quenzius was continuing his journey, but that was not Montane's intention.

"Where are you off to?" he asked.

"Straight in front of us, as you see," replied Quenzius.

"Then you are in no great hurry."

"On the contrary, I am in a very great hurry."

"Oh! but you won't refuse to have a bit with me all the same."

"I have already breakfasted, Monsieur Montane."

"Well, then, a glass of porter; there is an inn, about twenty yards from here, where they sell excellent stuff."

Every one has his own failing. That of Quenzius was a love of porter.

"Excellent porter, did you say?"

"I said 'excellent,' and I won't unsay it; custom-house officials examine carefully all that passes between their lips."

Quenzius had already lost a little time in this conversation, when he recollected the errand on which Mynheer August had sent him.

"No, thank you, Captain, I am in such a hurry that I must not waste a moment, even in your agreeable company."

"Oh! come, Mr. Secretary, a dry pen will not write: you say you are in a hurry; well, to give quickness to your feet, you must give support to your stomach."

"I admit the truth of both your proverbs, Captain; but it is no less true that I cannot accompany you."

"That's a great pity, my dear Quenzius; I wanted to talk a little business with you. I am going to Vlam-Huis presently."

"Your journey will be useless, Captain; my employer will be at the mill the whole day, as it is the beginning of the month."

"At the mill? Oho!" thought Montane, "the barrel of gold is rolling into our cellar of its own accord, it seems to me. Now, Mr. Cashier, you may go where you please; I have got all I wanted out of you without even going to the expense of a bottle of beer."

And loosing his hold of Quenzius' cloak, he left him free to continue his road.

Then, summoning his worthy follower,—

"Cabaret," said he, "follow that rogue," pointing to Quenzius. "And at the same time give the signal to four or five soldiers to follow you in their turn. Should either he or his companion attempt to launch a boat from the beach, arrest them and bring them to me. If you meet any other soldiers, despatch them to the mill to reinforce their comrades in case of need."

"It shall be done, Captain," answered Cabaret; "only, the job smacks of profit, you know."

"Who told you there wouldn't be any profit?"

"Oh! of course, the leaders always make a good thing of it; it is not that which disturbs me."

"Make your mind easy. There will be plenty for everybody," said the captain, rubbing his hands together.

The same evening, van Naarvaersen arrived at the mill with his daughter and Elim; the sailors had already been there for two days waiting for them, and all

was in readiness to start as soon as it was dark.

Van Naarvaersen drew out his watch; it was five o'clock.

Elim rose from his seat with a deep sigh; Jane threw herself in tears upon her father's neck.

"Farewell, Elim," said she, "farewell for ever; for I have a presentiment that we shall never meet again."

Elim kissed the girl's hand.

"Dearest Jane," said he, wetting her loved hand with his tears, "may God crush me with His wrath if I don't soon come back to you somehow or other."

"*Saperloot!*" said Mynheer August, "where do you get such words from? Console yourself, my girl, with the thought that the next spring will bring new flowers. It is a curious thing!" he continued as he mounted his horse, "only yesterday I could have sworn that Jane didn't know the difference between a cock and a hen, and now—*Saperloot!*"

As Mynheer August was speaking only to himself, it was sufficient that he knew his own meaning.

There were two roads leading to the sea: the one short and direct, which our shipwrecked mariners had taken; the other making a bend and going round by Helmond.

It was this last road which our travellers took.

Elim rode along buried in thought: Mynheer August, seeing that he was not inclined for conversation, chatted with the guide, who was carrying a lantern.

The five sailors brought up the rear, talking to one another in low tones.

"What the deuce shall we say to our mates when we get aboard again?" observed one of them.

"That we have come from the kingdom of frogs, inasmuch as men live here much as frogs do with us."

"Go on," said a third, "it is bad to break the glass out of which you have drunk. What have we come short of here? Ham or brandy? No, thank God! you could eat as fast as you liked, there was plenty more put before you, and before you had finished your first glass, another was already poured out."

"True," said the first, "and it would be a sin to be ungrateful: we were helped to our heart's content; the bread was as white as sugar, the cheeses as big as blocks of stone, and we had coffee every morning!"

"For my part," replied the second, "I shan't go out of my way to thank them; in vain did I ask them for black bread; they always answered, '*Nix gout.*' As for the coffee, they strained it through a cloth, giving us the thin and keeping the thick for themselves, the greedy pigs! while as for the cheese, it was all in holes!"

"Each to his taste," said Yorsko, sententiously, "and you can't take your own rules into other people's establishments. For my own part, if ever I am hungry some fine day, I shall think of the splendid dinners that I got with the worthy man who is walking in front of you, and I warrant you I shall be filled by the mere recollection of them."

"No doubt; lazy folk are always thinking about stuffing themselves," replied the second. "It is all very well to go visiting, but, after all said and done, one is always best off at home."

"Never mind! Heaven send we see our mates again," said the sailors, quickening their pace.

It seemed at first as though Heaven were sending a favourable answer to this prayer. They arrived at the spot fixed for embarkation without misadventure; the sea, though black-looking, was calm; the shore appeared deserted.

"*God sy met ons!*" said the guide, clapping his hands, "he ought to be waiting for us there."

"*Saperloot!*" said Mynheer August.

"Are you certain this is the place?" asked Elim.

"As sure as I am of my *Pater noster*," said the guide.

They walked some way along the beach, but neither boat nor fisherman was to be seen.

Mynheer August lost all patience: a man who failed to keep his word he regarded as worse than a thief.

"*Saperloot!*" he cried, "I'll give them all a good dressing down! To take my money and then not be in time! I'll make it so hot for them that my ducats will melt in their pockets. Drunken scoundrels! I wager they are at the inn."

But all this outburst did not advance matters in the slightest degree, and the position of Elim and his men became more and more critical.

Mynheer August sent the guide on Elim's horse to examine the shore to the

left, while he went himself to the fisherman's hut.

Meanwhile Elim, left alone with his men, proposed that they should make a search on their own account. Accordingly he set off, following the beach in the opposite direction to that taken by the guide, hoping to fall in with the boat which was to take them, or find another which might be hired.

As he approached the spot where he had been cast ashore by the tempest, he noticed something white.

Laying a hand on the shoulder of Yorsko, who was following him, he pointed with the other to the object which had attracted his attention.

"Look," said he.

"If I wasn't sure that our boat was broken to bits, Lieutenant, I should say she had come out of the water like a sea-calf and was asleep on the beach; but, anyhow, if it is not our boat, it is some other boat."

"Go softly and silently, my lads," said Elim; "I fancy I see some men lying down there."

"Not only lying down, but asleep," said one of the sailors, "I can hear them snoring."

"And there is no sentry," said Elim joyfully.

"No, none," answered the sailors.

"In that case," said Elim, still lowering his voice, "let us surround them and take them prisoners; we won't kill them if we can possibly avoid it."

The sailors dispersed, surrounded the little boat, and threw themselves upon the sleeping men, who found themselves pinioned and gagged almost before they awoke.

The man who appeared to be their leader was then un gagged.

"Who are you?" asked Elim in German.

"Dutch custom-house officers," replied the prisoner.

"Who is your captain?"

"Monsieur Montane."

"Ha! an old acquaintance; and what are you doing there?"

"I don't know; four of us have gone off somewhere into the country by the captain's order, and we have been left to take care of the boat."

"Many thanks for taking care of it for us," said Elim.

"Lieutenant," said Yorsko, "the boat

is quite ready and is waiting for you."

"Put this man and the weapons in the locker of the boat," said Elim. The rest of them can remain where they are; we shall probably be a long way from here by the time Captain Montane returns. All is ready, you say, Yorsko?"

"Everything, Lieutenant."

"Then, first our prayer, and then to your oars."

The prayer being finished, the oars were in the act of being raised, when it seemed to Elim that a feeble cry for help reached his ears.

"Stop!" said he to Yorsko, laying his hand on his shoulder.

CHAPTER IX

FLIGHT

WHILE the guide was wandering up and down the beach, and while Mynheer August was searching for the fisherman's hut, and Elim obtaining possession of the boat in such a lucky fashion, let us say a word about what was happening at the mill where we saw our shipwrecked friends arrive at the beginning of this story.

Jane had remained at the mill overcome with grief.

The poor child was in love as only a woman loves for the first time. Her pure young heart had received its first impress from the powerful hand of love, and to destroy that impress, you would have to break her heart as you break a glass.

On going into the inner room, the same in which her father had been almost murdered by the bandits, she had sunk into a chair and had remained there motionless and silent, like a statue of Dejection, showing no sign of life save the tears that trickled from her eyes.

Suddenly Quenzius entered, breathless and scared, his face as pale as death.

"Where is your father, Mademoiselle?" he cried, "where is your father?"

"He is where I should like to be," answered Jane, without noticing the emotion in Quenzius' voice or the alarm depicted on his countenance.

"In the name of the big book," cried

the latter, "tell me which way your father has gone."

"I don't know."

"But I must know! He is in danger."

"In danger! my father?" cried Jane, alarmed at last by the words of Quenzius. "What are you saying, Quenzius? My father! Why?"

"Ah! Mademoiselle! Mademoiselle! think of the burgomaster van Kempenaar van Driel."

"Why! what have I to do with your burgomaster? Don't you hear me asking you in what way my father is in danger?"

"Montane has denounced us all to the burgomaster, Mademoiselle."

"All! whom do you mean by all?"

"Well, you, your father, the Russians, and Monsieur Elim. He said your father was a traitor who had relations with the enemy, and had promised to hand over the fortress to the English and the Russians."

"Well, what then?"

"Why, the burgomaster gave orders that your father should be arrested and sent to prison for trial."

"My father in prison! to be tried! perhaps shot! Oh! our cup of misfortune is indeed full!"

"Alas!" said Quenzius, raising his hands and his nose to heaven.

"What are you doing here then, sir?" cried Jane. "Why don't you run, fly, to find my father? Warn him, so that he may get away and seek shelter among strangers. Tell him to go— Has he any money? Take these pearls and diamonds."

"I have taken from the bank all that he requires, only I have not had time to debit Mynheer August's account in the big book; but, should any misfortune occur, you must enter it yourself, Mademoiselle—Ten thousand new ducats."

"Will you go, wretched man!" cried Jane, pushing Quenzius out. "Tell my father to go away, do you understand? to go away, and not to be anxious about my mother or me. They will not harm two women."

"God grant it, Mademoiselle!" said Quenzius, climbing on to the back of the big carriage-horse and disappearing in the gloom like the phantom of a giant.

Jane remained stunned. Her love for her father had made her forget for the time her love for Elim.

She remained alone with the miller and his wife, or rather, alone with her grief.

An hour later a knock was heard at the door.

"Open!" cried a peremptory voice, "open, in the Emperor's name."

No answer was given.

"Look sharp!" said the same voice, "we know you are there. Open the door, or we shall treat you as rebels and set fire to the house."

"My God!" cried the miller's wife, "it is the voice of the same ruffian who tried to murder us, Peter."

"I hear you, you old hag!" cried Cabaret: "if you don't open the door, we will break it in."

"Ah! Mademoiselle, what are we to do?" said the miller's wife to Jane, who, hearing the noise, now appeared at the entrance to the kitchen. "We are lost and all we have."

"All we have!" said the miller, "what does that signify? The master will restore it to us a hundred times over; but our lives, the young lady—"

"I would rather die than fall into that ruffian's hands!" cried Jane. "Peter, guard the door as long as you can; I shall escape and try and join the others."

"Mademoiselle, Mademoiselle, beware of the canals!"

"Wasn't I brought up here? don't I know the smallest stream?"

And seizing her jewel-box, Jane jumped out of a low window into the garden, from which a path led down to the sea.

She had already reached the beach when the doors yielded to the blows of the bandits.

Without stopping or considering where she was, Jane ran along the shore. Fear gave her strength, the hope of rejoining Elim lent wings to her feet.

As she ran, she kept crying,—

"Father! Elim!"

And at last she thought she perceived close down by the sea some object resembling a boat and men moving about near it. But she was so breathless and exhausted with her efforts that she could scarcely articulate. It seemed to her as though she were being pursued; she was only a few yards from the water's edge, but unhappily the boat was disappearing.

She felt it impossible to take another step; her breath had failed her. She summoned all her strength to cry for the last time,—

"Father! Elim!"

Then she fell fainting on the beach.

Her pursuers were not more than a hundred yards from her.

CHAPTER X

THE FINGER OF GOD

IT was her last cry that Elim had heard.

"Back water, my lads, back water!" said he.

The sailors obeyed his directions, and the boat was pushed ashore again.

"Stop!" cried a voice, drawing gradually nearer, "stop, or we fire!"

"Help, my lads," said Elim. "One of you stay to mind the boat, the rest follow me."

And he sprang ashore with a pistol in each hand.

At twenty yards from the boat he found Jane motionless and lying like a corpse.

He seized her in his arms and carried her towards the boat.

But her pursuers were close upon her. Elim faced round. At two paces from him was Cabaret, some distance in advance of his men.

"Stop, yourself! or you are a dead man!" cried Elim.

The bandit stopped, but only for the purpose of raising his carbine to his shoulder.

But before he had rested his cheek against the stock, Elim fired, a flash gleamed in the darkness, and Cabaret, pierced to the heart by the lieutenant's bullet, rolled over on the sand.

Elim jumped into the boat.

"Now, my lads, pull! pull for all your're worth; not only are our own lives at stake, but hers too."

"The young mistress!" cried Yorsko. "Bravo, Lieutenant, well done!"

"Fire!" shouted a man from the shore, pointing at the boat, which was rapidly making off like a belated sea-bird.

The bullets spent themselves in the darkness; one only of them, striking the sea, drenched Jane's face with water.

"Thank you for the honour you do us, gentlemen!" cried Yorsko.

The water splashing into Jane's face made the girl open her eyes.

She was in her lover's arms.

"Elim! dear Elim!" she cried.

And their lips met in a long and tender embrace; the poor children had thought themselves separated for ever, and lo! the finger of God was reuniting them.

Suddenly Elim felt himself touched on the shoulder by Yorsko.

"Well?" he asked.

"Why! don't you see?—"

"What?"

"That we can see nothing, Lieutenant." And, in point of fact, a dense fog had just spread over the surface of the sea.

"Don't row another stroke! I hear the breakers."

The sailors stopped rowing. Elim laid Jane on the thwart and stood up in order to listen.

"The reefs are to starboard," he said.

"And to port as well, Lieutenant," said Yorsko, "do you hear?"

It was but too true; on both sides could be heard the sound of the waves as they dashed against the reefs.

Elim looked in alarm at Jane.

"Have we lost our bearings, Lieutenant?" asked one of the sailors.

"No," said Elim; "on the contrary, I know only too well where we are."

"There is a passage, no doubt," said Yorsko.

"Possibly," said Elim; "but who will show us it?"

"The custom-house man who is lying in the bottom of the boat," said Yorsko.

"I fancy that he ought to know it, as it is his business to patrol the coast."

"By God, Yorsko, you are right. Ungag him, but without untying his feet or hands."

Then, turning to the girl,—

"Don't be afraid, Jane dear," said he.

"Why should I be afraid, Elim? Shall I not die with you, if I must die?"

The custom-house man was ungagged.

"The reefs! the reefs!" he cried as soon as he had recovered speech.

"Good! he is afraid!" said Elim.

"Well, yes, we are on the reefs."

"But there is a passage," replied the man, whose terror increased in proportion as the sound became more audible.

"Can you find the passage?" said Elim. "I promise you not only your life and your liberty, but a hundred ducats into the bargain if you find it."

"I could find it blindfolded, Lieutenant."

"Untie his hands and give him the rudder."

His hands were promptly untied, and he took his place at the helm.

Elim sat beside him and cocked his second pistol.

"All right, all right," said the custom-house man, visibly terrified by the noise of the waves against the rocks, and putting the helm to starboard, "give way, give way hard!"

Elim repeated the order in Russian.

The sailors bent to the oars, and the little boat flew over the surface of the sea.

"Not too near the coast!" said Elim.

"But look on the port side," said the man.

And, truly enough, a long line of foam gleamed through the darkness; and, as the fog was dense, it was clear that the boat must be skirting the reefs at hardly twenty yards' distance.

"It will be impossible with this wind to make the open sea in a small boat, Lieutenant Elim," said one of the sailors.

"Would you rather go back ashore and fall into the hands of the French?" replied Elim.

Then turning to the pilot,—

"Courage!" he cried.

"I am risking my own life at the same time as yours," answered the custom-house man; "you can make your mind easy, I will do my best."

It was the best answer he could have made.

Elim took Jane in his arms again, and wrapped her in his cloak under the pretext of protecting her from the cold, but in reality to shut out the danger from her eyes.

Less resigned than she, he said to himself that it would be indeed a cruel fate if they should be brought together for a brief moment, only to be parted again for ever.

He had, however, retained the use of his eyes, and did not take them off the line of foam whose incessant roar filled his ears with terror.

At last he seemed to see a break in that line at a place where, for three or four cables' length, the sea appeared to be calm.

"The passage!" he said to the custom-house man.

"I see it all right," said the latter, porting the helm.

The little boat answered to the rudder like a horse obedient to the rein, and in an instant had left the line of reefs behind and found herself in the open sea.

They were now, however, in greater danger, perhaps, than before, and, as Yorsko had said, it was impossible to keep the sea in such a tiny craft.

The fog at the same time was growing more and more dense.

"I have done all that I undertook to do," said the custom-house officer in a tone of discouragement; "put me to death now, if you will, but I can do no more."

"True," said Elim, almost as much discouraged as the other.

And pressing Jane to his heart, he let his head fall with a sigh on the child's head.

He saw clearly that in this frail boat they could not proceed half a mile without being capsized.

Suddenly Elim raised his head; he had just heard the sound of a distant bell.

Nowhere does the sound of a bell travel so far as at sea and during the night; you might imagine that some bird with wings of bronze was skimming the waves.

"One, two, three," counted Elim.

And the last stroke died away with a long vibration.

"That sound doesn't come from shore, Lieutenant," said Yorsko, "the distance is too great."

An idea flashed across Elim's mind; he turned towards their Dutch pilot, and observed that he was gazing with an expression of delight in the direction from which the sound of the bell had come.

"I understand," said Elim to him, "we are close to your sloop, and they have just struck the hour aboard of her."

"Very likely," said the Dutchman.

"How many men on board?" asked Elim.

"Enough to string the lot of you up to the yards like lanterns."

"You won't enjoy that sight, my friend, whatever happens, for you will be a dead man long before."

Then, with a frown, and placing his pistol to the man's head, he repeated,—

"How many men are there?"

"Twelve," replied the pilot laconically, seeing that the young lieutenant was in no humour for joking.

Then turning to the sailors,—

"My lads," said he, "the good God has sent us a vessel which can keep the sea; it only remains for us to take her."

"In that case, Lieutenant, the thing is already done," answered Yorsko.

"There are a dozen men in the crew."

"They are not on the look out, we are; the proverb says, 'One man forearmed is worth two who are not,' so we are twelve to twelve—"

"But there is the young mistress," added Yorsko, nodding his head in the direction of Jane.

"One of you will look after her."

"Ah! then we shall be only five, that is to say, only ten against twelve—but bah! custom-house men, and Dutchmen into the bargain!" said Yorsko.

All this was said in Russian, so that Jane understood nothing of it.

"My lads," continued Elim, addressing the sailors, "you understand the situation, don't you? We are playing a difficult game; but, in face of the words—'It must be done'—none of you, I hope, will recoil. Besides, I will show you the way, and you will follow me."

"Through water as through fire, to paradise or to hell!" answered the sailors with one voice.

"Thanks, my lads; with you I could reach the moon: examine your guns, and the moment we come alongside the sloop, jump aboard and kill all who resist."

Then turning to the custom-house pilot,—

"As for you," he said, "you know our agreement."

"Pull away," said the pilot, turning the rudder in the required direction.

At the end of five minutes they perceived the vessel, which was rocking quietly on the waves.

A single sentry was pacing the deck.

By the movement which the sentry made Elim saw that they were discovered.

"Look out!" said he, again placing his pistol to the pilot's head.

"Who goes there?" cried the sentry.

The pilot gave the password.

"All right!" muttered the sentinel.

And turning away quite unsuspectingly, he summoned the chief officer.

"Am I going to leave you, Elim?" cried Jane in terror. "Oh! I can't leave you, even for a moment."

"Cling round my neck, then; we have reached our destination."

The boat had, in point of fact, now

come alongside the sloop. Elim supported Jane with one arm, while with the other he caught hold of a rope, and was the first to spring on board the sloop.

The five Russians followed their lieutenant.

The sentry tried to give the alarm, but before he could utter a word he was hurled overboard.

The Russians were masters of the deck.

Elim took out his purse and threw it to the pilot, who had remained in the boat.

"Here," said he, "a Russian always keeps his word. There is your money, to begin with; as for your liberty, you have got it; while as for your life, it depends on yourself, my friend; you found your way here, and you can find it back again."

Then, addressing his men, without paying any further attention to the pilot, who, with an oar in each hand, had already begun to draw away from the vessel,—

"Clap down the sailors' hatchways, my lads," said he; "I will take charge of that of the officers."

"Where are you going?" asked Jane.

"To pay a visit to Captain Montane, most probably," said Elim; "but, as he is a bachelor, it wouldn't be proper for a young lady to go and see him; so sit down and wait for me."

Reassured by the humorous tone adopted by her lover, Jane did as she was ordered.

Elim wrapped her in his cloak: selfish lover that he was, he would not have the girl's cheeks lose any of their roses.

Then he went softly down the officers' gangway, and, guided by the sound of voices, made for the door of the cabin. Ascertaining that the key was on the outside, he bent his head down and looked through the keyhole.

He was not mistaken: the captain, seated at table with two of his lieutenants, was drinking bumpers of champagne.

"Ah! Captain," one of the lieutenants was saying, "you have done it neatly, upon my word."

"To Mademoiselle Jane's health!" said the other.

"To Jane's health!" repeated the captain, emphasizing the baptismal name, without its accompanying title of respect. "Thank you, gentlemen."

And the three officers emptied their glasses.

"Go and fetch your mates," said Elim to Yorsko.

"I understand," said the latter, going off on tiptoe.

Elim continued to look and to listen.

The captain uncorked a third bottle.

"And the dear lover," asked one of the lieutenants, "what are you going to do with him?"

"Ah! her lover, that's quite another matter," said Montane with an evil smile; "he is to be brought here to me tied and bound; after which we shall ship him off to France, so as not to be annoyed by his lover's complainings."

"Here we are, Lieutenant," said Yorsko.

"All right," answered Elim; "be silent, and do as you see me do."

"Well, Captain," said one of the lieutenants, "let us be generous."

"With all my heart," said the captain, throwing himself into a chair with a self-conceited air,—

"Out with it, Lieutenant, what is it?"

"To the health of the poor lover! It is the least you can do for him, Captain."

"Ha! a good ideal!" cried Montane.

"To the health of the poor lover, as you say; and I only regret that he is not here to give point to the toast."

"Your wish is answered, Captain," said Elim, opening the door: "here he is."

The three officers gazed in stupefaction at the new-comer, who had sprung from nobody knew where. Elim stepped forward to the table, filled a glass, and, raising it above his head, repeated,—

"To the health of the poor lover!"

Then, turning to his sailors,—

"Shout hurrah! all of you," he said in Russian.

The sailors shouted hurrah! in chorus.

Elim emptied his glass.

"Well, gentlemen, don't you drink?"

Captain Montane, who had recognised Elim, trembled so violently that his glass emptied itself.

The other two officers, not understanding what was happening, set their glasses down on the table and put their hands to their swords.

"No resistance, gentlemen," said Elim; "we are masters of your ship, and should you doubt the fact, here is the proof: come in, my lads!"

The five sailors entered with their guns in their hands.

"Captain," said Elim, addressing Montane, "this is one of those tricks which Fate sometimes plays us. Instead of my being in your power, it is you who are in mine; instead of my being shipped off to France, it is you who will go and travel in Russia; but you won't be badly off, as you will get there in time for the sleighing. Your weapons, gentlemen."

There was no possibility of resistance; accordingly the three officers gave up their swords.

"Yorsko," continued Elim, "take these gentlemen to the lieutenant's cabin; we want this one for a lady."

CHAPTER XI

A HURRIED MARRIAGE

WE know for what lady the cabin was destined.

The moment Jane was settled in it, Elim, taking command of the sloop, gave orders to weigh anchor.

"Suppose we were merely to cut the cable?" said Yorsko.

"Quite right; that is much the quickest way."

Yorsko seized a hatchet and severed the cable, and the ship began to drift.

But almost immediately Elim gave orders for the sails to be unfurled, the wind which was blowing off shore filled them, and the little sloop, though somewhat clumsy in build, ploughed the waves merrily enough.

At dawn Elim perceived the line of warships forming the blockade.

A smaller cutter, which acted each night as scout to the fleet, was making for them.

The young officer in command of the cutter perceived, from her build and the cut of her rigging, that the sloop was Dutch. He fired upon her with his one gun.

And, having given the alarm, he hastened to rejoin the fleet.

In an instant all the batteries of the fleet were lighted up with lanterns.

Elim seized a speaking-trumpet and shouted,—

"Do not fire; I am a Russian, bringing in a Dutch vessel."

His voice, however, died away in space.

A flame shot from the port-hole of the nearest vessel, and a ball, ricocheting on their port side, sent the water flying over the deck.

"What the deuce are they up to, Yorsko?" asked Elim.

"Can't you see, Lieutenant; they are firing at us."

"But they will sink us!"

"In about ten minutes, unless—"

A second ball cut short Yorsko's words and severed the main-yard at the same moment.

"Unless what?" asked Elim.

"Unless we alter our flag, Lieutenant."

Elim raised his head; the Dutch flag was floating proudly at the peak of the sloop.

"You can see for yourself, Lieutenant," said Yorsko, "that they think we are coming to board them."

"What a fool I am!" said Elim.

Then, turning to his men,—

"Down with the Dutch flag," said he, "and hoist this handkerchief."

The Dutch flag was lowered, and Elim's handkerchief took its place.

Before the exchange had time to take effect, a third ball buried itself in the fore part of the sloop.

But the firing ceased when the white handkerchief, which indicates a vessel bearing a flag of truce, was observed.

Elim cast his eyes over the fleet and recognised his own ship.

"Steer for the *Vladimir*, Yorsko," said he; "you must be in a hurry, like myself, to get home again."

Yorsko steered towards the *Vladimir*.

It now began to be light enough to distinguish what was going on in the fleet.

The crews of all the vessels, aroused by the shots which had just been fired, were on the decks and shrouds.

No less curiosity was evinced on board the *Vladimir*, towards which, in preference to the other vessels, the sloop appeared to be steering.

"Good!" said Elim, "there is Nicolas Alexiovitch looking at us through his spy-glass."

Then, taking up the speaking-trumpet, he shouted,—

"Halloa! Nicolas Alexiovitch, good morning."

"Deuce take it if it isn't that madman Elim!" said the lieutenant.

"Elim, Elim, Elim!" shouted twenty officers at least.

"Lieutenant Melosor!" shouted the crew with one voice. "Hurrah for Lieutenant Melosor!"

"Run alongside!" cried Elim to the sailors.

The latter, armed with boat-hooks, by means of which they broke the shock, grappled the sloop to the frigate.

"Really, my dear Elim," said Nicolas Alexiovitch, holding out his hand to the young lieutenant, "you must be a magician: you fall into the water and don't get drowned; you go through fire and don't get burnt. We thought you had been strung up, and here you are safe and sound; welcome to you."

"And I haven't come alone," said Elim, holding out his hand to Jane, whom Yorsko was supporting in his arms.

"Ah!" said Nicolas, looking at the girl: "I am not surprised that we mistook you for an incendiary; those two eyes are enough to set fire to a whole fleet."

"My dear Nicolas," said Elim, "be good enough to give the lady your arm until I have explained matters to the captain."

Nicolas Alexiovitch bowed to Jane and offered her his arm.

Elim found the captain in the act of ascending the companion-ladder from the cabin to the deck.

The captain uttered an exclamation of joy as he recognized Elim, for he loved the young man as though he were his own son.

"Good! very good!" said he when Elim had finished his story: "I will see that you get a good reward for the sloop which you have brought in. But tell me, sir," added the captain in a stern tone, "who is the lady who accompanies you?"

The captain, looking through his port-hole, had seen Jane being transferred to the frigate.

Elim thereupon related the story with which we are already acquainted. The captain listened coldly to the young man's narrative.

"All that you have told me, Elim Paulovitch, is true, I have no doubt," answered the captain; "but your heroic conduct in the case of the drowning sailors, and your return with one of the enemy's ships, have attracted the eyes of the whole fleet to you. You must preserve

your name pure from all suspicion, Elim; as matters stand, any one will have it in his power to say that you have invented this whole tale in order to contract an intimacy with a person who is unworthy of you."

"Captain!—" exclaimed the young man, an angry blush mounting to his cheeks.

"Do not let us get angry, Elim; on the contrary, listen to me calmly. The more angry you grow, and especially with me, the more you will be to blame. You know, do you not, that our maritime regulations forbid our having women on board in time of war. What story would you have me tell the admiral? His first question will be, 'Is she his wife or his sister?'"

Elim hung his head and remained silent. The captain continued in a milder tone,—

"Let us even suppose, my dear Elim, that this affair should do you no harm in the estimation of the service; ought you not to consider the reputation of this poor child, who will have all the more to lose in respect to the affair in proportion as she is innocent? You are now her sole protector, Elim, and a girl's honour is a sacred thing."

"What must I do, Captain?" said Elim sadly. "Guide me, counsel me."

"You wish me to advise you, Elim?" "Oh! yes, Captain, I entreat you to do so."

"You want me to speak to you as if you were my son?"

"I ask you, as a favour, to do so."

"Do you love this girl, Elim?"

"I am ready to give my life for her."

"Does she love you?"

"With all her heart."

"Can you make her happy?"

"I am sure of it, Captain."

"Have you the consent of her parents?"

"She is engaged to me."

"Well, then, my dear fellow, marry her!"

"So quickly, Captain?" asked the young man, almost choking with joy.

"At this very instant; I will give you my cabin and will be your best man."

"Oh! my good, kind friend!" cried Elim, throwing himself into the worthy officer's arms.

"Come," said the captain, "now it is all arranged: go and warn the bride; it is

only fair that she should have five minutes' notice."

Elim went up on deck and, half laughing, half crying, snatched the girl from the arm of Nicolas Alexiovitch and pressed her to his heart.

"But what has happened, Elim, what has happened?" asked Jane.

"My dear Jane—" answered Elim, "Good heavens! I can't believe my happiness."

"Tell me; speak."

"The captain insists on our being married immediately."

"Immediately?" repeated the girl, quite bewildered.

"You can't refuse to obey him, Jane, it is the law."

"I don't want to refuse," said the girl, blushing and lowering her eyes.

"Jane, you are an angel!"

"The priest is waiting for the bride and bridegroom in the captain's cabin," said Yorsko, "and I warn you, Lieutenant, he is in a hurry."

"Come," answered the girl in a scarcely articulate voice, while her arm, trembling on that of Elim, spoke more intelligibly than her words.

Nicolas Alexiovitch acted as father to the bride, and the captain performed the office of best man for the bridegroom.

The whole crew had the privilege of going down between decks and being spectators of a ceremony which, taking place but seldom on board ship, aroused general curiosity.

As soon as the nuptial benediction was given, the corks of the champagne bottles were heard popping noisily.

They were the guns that celebrated the wedding.

Jane, covered with blushes, thanked the spectators and offered her rosy cheeks to the officers of the *Vladimir* to be kissed.

"And now," said the captain, "you must be tired out. Good night, my

children, they will awake you in time for dinner."

He shut the door and went out.

Elim and Jane remained alone.

* * * * *

Three days after the wedding, the fleet went into winter quarters at Tchata.

The first person whom the newly married couple encountered on the quay was Mynheer August van Naarvaersen.

Elim and Jane threw themselves into his arms, both addressing him as "father."

The old man nearly died of joy; he wept, he laughed, he caressed, he scolded.

But there was no good in going back over the past; it was settled, and settled for the best.

A letter was written to Jane's mother, who had remained at home.

A week later Jane received an answer from her mother.

The worthy woman sent her blessing; but she could not forbear expressing to Jane her regret that she had been unable to make, for her wedding breakfast, the famous preparation of apples, the secret of which she alone possessed. And what was also, according to her, an irreparable misfortune, was the absence of the celebrated bed which had been in the family for five generations.

It was Jane's turn to laugh and cry.

"Father dear," said she, "will you tell my mother—"

"That you got on very well without it, my child," answered the old man.

Jane looked at her husband and threw herself, covered with blushes, into his arms, while Elim, over his shoulder, squeezed the hand of Mynheer August van Naarvaersen.

"*Saperloot!*" said the old fellow, "it is a fool's trick to check one's tears; they only choke a man."

And he burst into tears, without an attempt at concealing his emotion.

Happily, they were tears of joy.

STORIES FROM POUSHKIN

THE SNOWSTORM

A FINE SHOT

THE COFFIN-MAKER

THE POET POUSHKIN

POUCHKIN, whose death took place in 1837, and who is as popular in Russia as Schiller in Germany, is hardly known in France. Nevertheless, he was a man of ideas and a master of literary form; he was a patriot and a poet.

Until his time, except Kriloff, the writer of fables, Russia had not produced any true representative of the national genius; and no nation can, intellectually speaking, claim to be considered as a nation until it has produced a literature of its own. With the appearance of Kriloff's Fables and Poushkin's Poems, the history of Russian Literature begins.

In the present day, Russia can boast of many true poets; besides Kriloff and Poushkin, there may be mentioned Lermontoff, Nékrassoff, and the Countess Rostopchin; she has also her writers of fiction: Pissienesky, Tourgenieff, Gregorovitch, Tolstoi, Tschedrin, Jadofskaya, Tono, and Staniki.

But to return to Poushkin.

He was born in 1799, in the government of Pskoff; he was the son of a landed proprietor, and the grandson, through his mother, of Hannibal, a negro belonging to Peter the Great. This negro, having been carried off from the coast of Guinea on a slave-ship, jumped overboard when twenty-five leagues from land, not seeking life but death. In this hope he was disappointed, for a boat was lowered and he was picked up. Loaded with irons, and in the bottom of the hold, he was carried to Holland, and there exposed for sale. Peter chanced to see him and hear his story. Being touched by his love of freedom, the emperor bought him, and took him in his train to Russia, where he showed great intelligence, rose to the rank of general, and became the founder of the Russian artillery.

Prince Peter Dolgorouki, in his *Notes on the Chief Russian Families*, tries to

show that on the female side Poushkin could claim descent from the great house of Poushkin, whose seat was at Rad-scha. This family, which was divided into two branches—Bobrischoff-Poushkin and Moussin-Poushkin—came from Germany, and settled in Russia during the thirteenth century, and, during the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, it is said, gave several boyars to the country of their adoption. But this is more than doubtful. Perhaps since his death these families have claimed kinship with the poet, desiring to enrich the lustre of their long descent by arrogating to themselves a share of his fame in letters. However this may be, it is certain that in the lifetime of the poet, there was no question of this relationship. When Boulgarin in his paper attacked Poushkin, and taunted him with the baseness of his origin, the poet set up no claim to illustrious ancestry, but replied by an epigram which recalls the lines of Béranger, *Je suis vilain*, and of which the following is a translation:—

"Monsieur de Boulgarin, who treats me like a helot,
Declares that formerly my grandsire Hannibal
For half a glass of rum was purchased by a pilot
Upon the distant banks of the river Senegal.

'Tis true: but let him add to this bad joke of his,
That purchaser was God's own pilot from the skies,
Who, guiding the great bark of Russia's destinies,
Made Asia hold its poop, America its prow,
And joined the seas of fire unto the seas of snow."

Poushkin, who had been educated at the Imperial Lyceum founded in Tzarskoye Selo in 1811 by Alexander I., was by nature no apt pupil. He entered the Lyceum the year of its foundation, and was still there when in 1818 he wrote his *Ode to Liberty*. This Ode he threw in the path of the Emperor, who picked it up and read it; and it is a proof of the injustice of Poushkin's accusations, that this

Emperor, branded in the poem with the name of tyrant, neither threw him into prison nor had him tried, although it was the dead body of Alexander's murdered father which the poet treated with such indignity. Poushkin was merely told to leave St. Petersburg and to return home. Later on he was sent to the Caucasus. In France, an order to go, gun in hand, and adventure one's life, is regarded, not as a punishment, but as a favour.

The solitude, the mountains with their torrents and snow-capped summits, the sparkling sea, all combined to develop in Poushkin that melancholy and that energy which makes his poetic genius so admired by the Russians. From the mountain gorges and from the borders of the Caspian Sea he flung his verses towards Russia, and the wind from the east carried them to Moscow and St. Petersburg. It was at this period, just when Byron's poems were appearing, that Poushkin wrote his *Prisoner of the Caucasus*, a work which takes rank beside *The Corsair* and *The Giaour*.

Poushkin's genius interceded for him with the Emperor, and the poet was soon allowed to return to his father's house; and it was while he was at Pskoff that the famous conspiracy, got up by Pestel, Ryleyieff, Mouravieff-Apostol, Bestucheff, and Kochoffsky, was hatched. Ryleyieff tried to get Poushkin to join, but he, not believing the plot could succeed, refused. Wishing, however, to be at hand when the impending events took place, he borrowed a passport from a friend, and, quitting Pskoff, which he was under orders not to leave, he set out for St. Petersburg.

He had driven about three versts when a hare ran across his path. Now, in Russia, which is the most superstitious of countries, this is the worst of omens, threatening catastrophe on the way. Among the Romans, kicking accidentally against a stone had the same meaning, which recalls the melancholy witticism of Bailly, who, on his way to the scaffold, stumbling over a pebble, remarked, "A Roman would have turned back."

Although very superstitious, Poushkin resolved to defy fate, and when the postilion turned round and asked what he should do, he received the order to go on. The postilion obeyed, but a few versts farther the same thing happened. This time, after a moment of indecision,

Poushkin gave in and went home, saying in French, "The shorter our follies are the better." He probably owed his life to this circumstance, for if he, with his antecedents, had been in St. Petersburg during the events which occurred in December, he would have been hung with Ryleyieff or exiled with Troubetz-Roi.

He was still in Pskoff when he learned the fate of his friends. Always ready for the fray, he wrote at once a verse to the effect that short as was their then Emperor's reign, he had already sent two hundred men to Siberia and executed five.

We wonder if Nicholas heard of this fresh offence against the throne. What we do know is, that from the date of the trial of the Dekabrists, Poushkin was again taken into favour. Among the papers of the conspirators, his letter declining to join them had been found and laid before the Emperor, who, not inquiring too closely into Poushkin's motives for refusing, was only too glad to grant a favour after the terribly severe sentence passed on the conspirators; accordingly, Poushkin was summoned to St. Petersburg.

When the Imperial order reached him, Poushkin regarded himself as lost. Was Nicholas I., who was now on the throne, disapproving of the clemency of Alexander, going to make him pay a second time for his *Ode to Liberty*, although the full penalty had already been enacted? Or, what was more to be dreaded, had the Emperor heard of the couplet which had just fallen from his pen?

As there was no means of evading obedience to the order, Poushkin set out for St. Petersburg, where, to his great astonishment, his reception was most gracious. The Emperor appointed him Imperial Historiographer, and commanded, as his first task, a history of Peter the Great.

Poushkin, who was capricious like the majority of poets, in place of treating of the reign of Peter, wrote an account of the Revolt of Pougatcheff, a work of which even Russians think very little; indeed, we must say that Poushkin's manner of setting about the duties of his new office was not a happy inspiration.

It is, however, to be noted, that in spite of his favour at court, Poushkin

changed none of his opinions, and, far from forgetting his exiled friends, his love and sympathy for them became stronger, and he lost no opportunity of breaking into songs of regret for their fate, or giving vent to the battle-cry of revenge.

Every year the foundation of the Lyceum was celebrated by a dinner, at which the old students met, thus keeping alive many college friendships which else would have died out in the course of time. At one of these dinners at which Poushkin was present, four of those who had graduated with him were absent, viz. Valkorsky, who was fighting in the Caucasus, Mathuskin, a naval officer, who was taking a voyage round the world, a cousin of Poushkin's of the same name, and Kuchelbecker; these last two buried alive as Dekabrist in the Siberian mines. Poushkin rose, and at the risk of being sent to join them, improvised a toast in their honour in verse in which their several situations were recalled in the happiest yet in the most pathetic manner.

As his voice ceased there was a silence as of death in the hall, and then a burst of applause. Although sixty students were present there was no informer among them. This, which would have been fine in any time and country, was doubly fine in Russia under Nicholas I. Other verses, which no one dared print, were circulated in manuscript, and Poushkin's popularity increased from day to day among the younger generation, whose warm blood made them appreciate generous ideas.

About this time Poushkin fell deeply in love with a young girl, and married her. During the happy days which followed, he published several poems of varied form, in which at bottom can still be traced the deep melancholy and bitter spirit of their author.

There is much variety in Poushkin's poems; his genius was so malleable that it lent itself to every passing influence; or, more properly speaking, it was so strong that it moulded a form for itself in every case. Besides his poems, he left behind two volumes of prose: one, the *Revolt of Pougatcheff*, mentioned above, and the other a collection of tales, one of which, *The Captain's Daughter*, is already known in France. I have translated three shorter tales,

viz. *A Fine Shot*, *The Snowstorm*, and *The Coffin-Maker*.

Poushkin's genius had reached its full development and his popularity was at its height when the event happened by which his country lost him at the age of thirty-eight.

The Russian aristocracy had become very jealous of Poushkin, who had gained for himself a rank more illustrious and a name more widely known than that of the greatest aristocrat among them; for in war the poet's lyre is heard above the noise of battle, and in time of peace his notes find an echo in every soul.

This jealousy led to unworthy attempts to torture his passionate heart, pulsing with African blood, if not to break it.

Nearly every day Poushkin received an anonymous letter, the object of which was to awake doubts of his wife's fidelity, by joining her name with that of a young man called D'Anthès, who was much at Poushkin's house.

Poushkin gave D'Anthès to understand that his visits were disagreeable to him, and D'Anthès ceased to call. For a time all went well, until one day Poushkin, meeting D'Anthès on the staircase, and boiling over with rage, sprang at the young man's throat, and tried to choke him. D'Anthès defended himself, and succeeded in getting out a few words explaining that he came to the house not to see Madame Poushkin, but her sister.

"There is only one way of proving to me that you do not lie," said Poushkin.

"Name it."

"You love my sister-in-law?"

"Yes."

"Well, marry her at once."

"I ask for the hand of your sister-in-law in marriage; be so good as to transmit my request to her parents."

A month later D'Anthès and Made-moiselle Gantchovna, Poushkin's sister-in-law, were married.

It may be thought that after the convincing proof of his innocence, and that of Madame Poushkin, given by D'Anthès, the matter might have been allowed to drop. But the unknown enemy had sworn to bring about the destruction of the poet. The anonymous letters began again, and affirmed that the marriage was only a base trick to enable the lovers to meet freely.

For months Poushkin repressed the rage, hate, and gall which filled his heart;

but at last he could no longer bear the sight of D'Anthès, and gave him to understand that he must either leave the country or accept a challenge.

D'Anthès did all he could to convince Poushkin that he was in the wrong, but in vain. Poushkin was like a madman. He threatened to inflict on D'Anthès one of those public indignities which leave a man no choice between a duel or dishonour.

D'Anthès at last consented to meet him, but begged for an interval of a fortnight between the challenge and the meeting, hoping that in the mean time Poushkin's rage would abate, and that he would not insist on carrying out his dreadful intention.

Poushkin consented to the delay, but the very morning the time was up Poushkin's second, Lieutenant-Colonel (now General) Danzas, called on D'Anthès. D'Anthès tried hard, through this gentleman, to bring Poushkin to a better mind, for, although the bravest of the brave, he felt a mortal repugnance to the duel. But at last he had to yield, Poushkin's instructions were positive.

Pistols were chosen, as is nearly always the case in Russia, and the same day the meeting took place, on the other side of the Neva, in a wood just beyond the last houses of the town.

The pistols were loaded—Poushkin watching the process carefully, lest the bullets should be abstracted—and thirty paces were measured out. The adversaries were to fire while advancing on each other, each being at liberty to take ten steps, which would reduce the distance between them to ten yards. D'Anthès did not move, but, when Poushkin had taken eight steps, fired at a distance of twenty-two paces. Poushkin fell; but, rising, took aim and fired in his turn. The ball passed through the fleshy part of D'Anthès fore-arm, and carried away one of his coat buttons. "Again!" cried Poushkin; but as he pronounced the word his strength failed him, and he fell a second time.

D'Anthès went towards him, but Poushkin's hate survived his wound; he made a sign with his hand to D'Anthès to keep back, and the sign was obeyed.

The two seconds now examined Poushkin's wound. The ball had entered the right side of the abdomen, between the lower ribs and the liver, and had buried itself in the intestines. Poushkin was

placed in his carriage and taken home. It was now about six o'clock in the evening.

Poushkin's valet took his master from Lieutenant-Colonel Danzas, and carried him upstairs.

"Where shall I take my master?" he asked.

"Into my study," said Poushkin, "and take care that my wife doesn't see me."

Madame Poushkin knew nothing as yet.

Poushkin was carried into his study, and, leaning on a chair, stood while he was undressed, his blood-stained shirt being replaced by clean linen. He then lay down on a divan, while his man spread a covering over him. At this instant he recognized his wife's approaching step.

"Don't come in," he cried, "I am engaged."

But she, suspecting something, persisted in entering.

"Good God! what is the matter?" she exclaimed, on finding him pale and lying down.

"I am not quite well," said Poushkin, "and I have thrown myself on the divan."

"Shall I send for the doctor?"

"Yes; please drop a line to Dr. Harrendt."

By this means he got his wife out of the room, and during her absence gave instructions to the valet, telling him if Harrendt was not at home he was to go to Scholtz and Jadler, two other physicians whom he knew, and then to tell his two friends, Joukoffsky, the poet, and Dahl, a doctor of medicine, but more a man of letters than a physician.

Joukoffsky, Dahl, and Harrendt, were out, but the valet found Scholtz and Jadler at home. They hastened to Poushkin's house, and making Danzas lead Madame Poushkin out of the room, they began their examination.

"I feel very bad," said Poushkin, moving with great agony, so as to let the doctors see the wound.

Scholtz made a sign to Jadler, who went out to get his case of instruments.

Finding himself alone with Scholtz, the wounded man asked—

"What do you think of my condition? Be frank."

"I cannot hide from you that your condition is grave, and that you are in danger," answered Scholtz.

"Say, rather, I am a dead man."

"At the right moment I shall consider it my duty to hide nothing from you. But we must wait for Harrendt, and see if his opinion coincides with mine. He is very skilful, and, whatever he thinks of your case, his opinion may be depended on."

"Thank you," said Poushkin in French, "You are an honest man. I see that I must set my house in order."

"Should you not like to send for some of your relations?" asked Scholtz.

Poushkin did not answer, but, turning his face towards his books, murmured in Russian, "Farewell, dear friends;" but it was uncertain whether he meant those dead friends, or the friends who were living.

After a short time he asked, "Do you think I can live an hour?"

"Certainly! I only asked the question, thinking you might like to see some one belonging to you. Monsieur Pietnieff, for instance, he is outside."

"Very well," said Poushkin; "but above all, I should like to see Joukoffsky."

Suddenly he exclaimed, "Water! water! my heart is stopping!"

Scholtz felt his pulse, and found it weak and rapid, while his hand was cold. He left the room to prepare a draught, and while he was so occupied, Jadler returned with his instruments, bringing with him a doctor of the name of Salomon. Dr. Harrendt also arrived. A glance at the wound showed him there was no hope; but he applied cold compresses to the wound and prescribed cooling draughts which soon had a soothing effect on the patient. Spassky, the family doctor, having also arrived meantime, Harrendt gave the patient into his care, and he, with the three other doctors, withdrew, knowing they could depend on the skill of their colleague, and his friendship for Poushkin.

"I feel very bad," said Poushkin again, seeing Spassky beside him.

The latter tried to reassure him, but Poushkin stopped him by a gesture.

From this moment he seemed to forget himself, thinking only of his wife.

"Above all things," said he to Spassky, "don't raise her hopes; don't hide my condition from her. You know she has no self-control. As to me, treat me as you think best. I consent to everything."

Indeed, as one can easily imagine,

Madame Poushkin, although she did not know how great was the danger, was in a state bordering on despair. Although she was strong in her innocence, she was quite well aware that it was about her that the duel had been fought, and she could not forgive herself for having been the involuntary cause of a misfortune so much greater than she as yet knew, poor lady!

From time to time, silent and flitting about like a ghost, she came into the room. Although Poushkin, who lay with his face to the wall, could not see her, he always divined her presence, and would whisper to Spassky, "Take her away, please."

He seemed to dread the thought of her seeing him suffer, more than the sufferings themselves.

"My poor wife!" he said once to Spassky, with a slight shrug of the shoulders, "the world will tear her reputation to tatters, and yet she is innocent."

He made these remarks in the calm tone habitual to him in his ordinary state of health, for with the exception of the first night, when for a few hours his sufferings were greater than human strength could bear, he showed wonderful fortitude.

"I have been present at thirty battles," Harrendt often said in after days, "and I have seen many die, but never one with the courage of Poushkin."

What was more, Poushkin, who in health had a hasty and violent temper, having conquered the agony of the first hours, became another man. The storm which all his life had muttered in his heart, died away, and left no trace. He never uttered an impatient word.

It was as if he had already entered into the peace of death and risen above humanity. He had even ceased to hate. Greitch and Boulgarin had constantly attacked him in their paper, and he had been in the habit of replying to these attacks with gloomy bitterness. Now, in the midst of his sufferings, he recollected that he had received word the day before of the death of Greitch's son.

"That reminds me," said he to Spassky, "if you see Greitch, remember me to him, and tell him he has my sincere sympathy in his great loss."

On being asked if he would like to make his confession and receive Holy

Communion, he assented, and having asked the doctor if he would live till noon the next day, and receiving a favourable answer, he desired that the priest should come at seven o'clock next morning. Having performed his religious duties, his peace of mind became, if possible, deeper. He called Spassky, and asked him to hand him some papers, pointing out the place in which they were. They were in his own handwriting. He then called Lieutenant-Colonel Danzas to him, and made him take note of a few debts. But this fatigued him so much that he was not able to give all the directions he wished. Feeling his weakness increase, he thought his last moment had come, and panted out to Spassky, "My wife! call my wife!"

Madame Poushkin, who was listening at the door, ran in, and a scene ensued, whose sadness is beyond description. He then asked for his children; they were still in bed, but they were roused, and brought to their father while not yet quite awake. He gazed at them, one after another, for a long time, placed his hand upon their heads and blessed them, and then, feeling that his emotions threatened to overpower him, and anxious to reserve some strength for the supreme moment of parting, he sent them away by a movement of his hand.

When they had left, he asked Spassky and Danzas who else was waiting. They mentioned the poet Joukoffsky and Prince Viasemsky.

"Call them," said he, in a feeble voice.

He gave his hand to Joukoffsky, who, feeling that it was ice-cold, raised it to his lips and kissed it.

Prince Viasemsky tried to speak, but the words would not come, and he and Joukoffsky were leaving the room so that Poushkin might not hear their sobs when he called them back.

"Tell the Emperor," said he, "that I am sorry to die; I should have been his devoted servant. Tell him I wish him a long, long reign, and much happiness in his children and country."

He spoke these words slowly and struggling with his weakness, but still clearly and intelligibly; then he took farewell of Viasemsky.

At this moment Vielgorsky, the famous 'cellist and master of the ceremonies at court, entered, desiring once more to press the hand of Poushkin. Poushkin gave

him his hand silently, and with a smile, but his eyes had a far-away look as if they were gazing into eternity. And, indeed, the next instant he laid his fingers on his pulse, and said, "Death is near."

Tourgenieff, the uncle of the celebrated novelist, next approached, but he stopped beside Vielgorsky, as Poushkin did not speak, only making a sign with his hand to him. With a great effort, a little later, he said, but to no one in particular, "Madame Karamsin." As she was not there she was sent for, and hastened to obey the summons. The interview lasted only a minute; but as she was turning away he recalled her, saying, "Catherina Alexeyevna, make the sign of the Cross over me." She did so, and he kissed her hand.

A dose of opium which he took just then gave him some calm, while cooling compresses which were laid on the wound lowered the fever. He had for some time showed himself as gentle as a child, helping those who were nursing him in every possible way, and never complaining or showing the least impatience, so that it almost seemed as if he were better.

It was thus that Doctor Dahl, whom we have mentioned before, found him when he returned. For this friend, whom he had been expecting since the previous day, he made an effort.

"My dear fellow," said he, "it is time for you to come. I am very low."

Dahl answered, "When we are full of hope, why do you despair?"

Poushkin, shaking his head, replied, "I have done with this world; I am dying; there is nothing to be done."

His pulse was now full and hard, and leeches were applied, whereupon the pulse became quicker and weaker. Poushkin remarking that Dahl was less cast down than the others, took his hand, and asked—

"Is there any one else here?"

"No one," replied Dahl.

"Then," said Poushkin, "tell me, am I soon going to die?"

"Die! what are you thinking of? Why, we all hope——"

A smile of inexpressible sadness hovered on Poushkin's lips.

"You hope still," said he; "I thank you."

Dahl passed the night of the 29th by his bedside, while Joukoffsky, Viasemsky, and Vielgorsky sat up in the adjoining room. The patient held Dahl's hand

almost constantly, but did not speak. Dahl damped his lips from time to time with cold water, or wiped the clammy sweat from his brow; heated cloths were laid on the wound, which Poushkin himself helped to change when needful, and although his agony was terrible, not a complaint escaped him.

Once only, throwing his arm above his head, he said, in a tone of discouragement, "Oh! how oppressed I feel; it is as if my heart were trying to burst, and yet could not." Sometimes he asked Dahl to raise him, to change his position, or to shake up his pillow; but before it was done he would say, "That'll do! that'll do! it is quite comfortable." Or else, "Stop! stop! it's not necessary; take hold of my hand, and raise me that way."

He asked once who was with his wife, and was told kind friends were there sharing his sufferings, that the antechamber and the drawing-room were crowded.

"I thank them," said Poushkin. Then, "Go tell my wife I am getting on all right, else she will think things worse than they are."

Indeed, so great was the number of people who either came themselves or sent to inquire, that the outer door, which gave admittance to the antechamber just outside of Poushkin's study, was continually opening and shutting. This noise being too much for the invalid, the door was locked, and all who came into the house had to come up the back staircase through the kitchen into the dining-room. This only intimate friends ventured on doing.

Later on, Poushkin asked what o'clock it was. Hearing that it was ten, he cried in a broken voice, "My God—how—much—longer—have I—to suffer? Have mercy—quicker—quicker. Oh, when will it be over? Quick—quick."

He half raised himself, but, as if exhausted by the effort, fell back fainting, and bathed in perspiration.

When pain got the mastery, or the dreadful oppression of which he spoke grew stronger, he made signs with his hands, and groaned softly.

"Alas! my poor friend," said Dahl, "how you suffer. Don't be ashamed of showing it. Take pity on yourself; it will do you good to give way."

"No, no," said the wounded man, "my wife would hear; besides, it would

be too bad if that stupid thing called pain were stronger than my will."

Toward five o'clock on the morning the pain increased to anguish. It was not till then that Harrendt gave a positive opinion. He now said all hope was at an end, the patient could not outlive the day. His pulse was hardly perceptible; his hands were like ice; he lay with closed eyes, and only moved his hands to take a morsel of ice and slowly lay it on his forehead. At two o'clock in the afternoon he opened his eyes and asked for some morosuka (a Russian fruit—a kind of cloudberry—which is eaten as a preserve).

When it was brought, he said, in a stronger voice, "Ask my wife to come; I want her to give it to me."

She came and, kneeling by the bed, gave her husband a couple of spoonfuls, and laid her cheek to his. He stroked her hair, saying, "There now, there now, I am better. It's nothing at all."

The serenity of his expression and the steadiness of his voice deceived her; she went away quite comforted.

"Go and look at him," said she to Doctor Spassky who came in. "Thank God, he is better; he will recover."

But even as she spoke death's cruel sentence was being carried out, for when Joukoffsky and Vielgorsky, hearing what Madame Poushkin had said, went to look at him the death agony had begun.

His mind seemed still quite clear, but from time to time he became unconscious. Once pressing Dahl's hand he begged, "Lift me up; let us go higher, still higher."

Was this the beginning of delirium, or was it a reaching out after God?

Coming to himself once more, he pointed to his bookcases, and said to Dahl, "It seemed to me that you and I were climbing up those shelves so high that my head turned."

Shortly after, with closed eyes, he felt for Dahl's hand, and said, "Come, come! Let us set off together."

On this Dahl, at the risk of hurting him, half raised him, when suddenly, as if aroused by the movement, he opened his eyes, and with transfigured face he said, "It is finished. I am going; I am going."

Then falling back on his pillow, "I can hardly breathe; I am choking."

These were his last words. His breathing, which till now had been regular,

grew slower, then ceased. One sigh passed his lips, but so softly and easily that almost no one remarked it; but it was the last.

Joukoffsky looked at Dahl after a moment's silence. "All is over," said Dahl.

It was a quarter to three on the afternoon of January 29, 1837. Poushkin had not completed his thirty-eighth year.

After his death things took their normal course. Joukoffsky had a cast of the face taken before the features had had time to change. It shows a man of calm and grand aspect.

Every care was taken both of the dead and living. Princess Viasiniki and Madame Tyagrashkaya never left the side of the widow. Other friends arranged the obsequies. On the day following his death, Dahl, Joukoffsky, Vielgorsky, and Tourgenieff placed him in his coffin, and, till he was removed, the house never emptied. More than ten thousand persons came to pay him a last visit. Sobs were heard on all sides, some had lost a relation, others a friend, and all, a poet.

The funeral mass in church was sung on February 1. All the aristocracy of St. Petersburg, all the ministers of State, and the foreign ambassadors were present. When the mass was over, the coffin was placed in a vault till it could be taken out of town.

On February 3, at ten o'clock at night, his friends gathered for the last time, and a service was held in the vault, and at midnight, by the light of the moon, of which the poet had so often sung, his coffin was placed on a sleigh, and accompanied by Tourgenieff only, Poushkin began his last journey.

Poushkin had often said that he would like to be buried at the Convent of the

Assumption of the Virgin, where his mother lay. This convent is in the Government of Pskoff, four versts from the village of Michaeloskoë, and there Poushkin had passed some of the most fruitful time of his life.

On February 4, at nine o'clock in the evening, his body reached Pskoff, and at five o'clock the next evening he finished the last stage of his journey, passing close by three lonely pines which he had loved and celebrated in song. The coffin was placed for the night in the cathedral church, and a mass was chanted. During the night a grave was dug for him beside his mother's, and the next morning at break of day the coffin was lowered into it, in the presence of Tourgenieff, and of the village peasants, who assembled to pay their last respects to their master. The sacred words of committal sounded sadly in the ear of all present as the first clod fell on the coffin—"Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust."

They apply fortunately only to the body, while the soul returns to God; and a poet having two souls, leaves one on earth, which inhabits his song.

I may perhaps have written a little too much of the last scenes of Poushkin's life, the details of which I have drawn from a letter written by Joukoffsky to Poushkin's father. These details, it may be said, are in general such as only a father who had lost a son would find of interest.

But a poet has not only two souls but two mothers. He goes down to one in the tomb, as Poushkin did; but one watches over his grave with jealous care, and desires to know how her son died; and the name of this second mother is POSTERITY.

ALEXANDRE DUMAS.

THE SNOWSTORM

CHAPTER I

TOWARDS the end of the year 1811, that time so remarkable in the history of Russia, an honest and excellent man, Gabriel Gabrielovich R . . . , was residing on his estate Nenarodovo. He was well known through the countryside for his hospitality, and his neighbours enjoyed coming to his house, where they ate and drank and played Boston with his wife at five copeks the game. Some of the visitors were drawn thither by the attractions of his daughter, Marie Gabrielovna, a young girl of slight figure, pale and saddened by the weight of seventeen summers. She might be reckoned among the richer heiresses of the place, and several of the neighbours desired to win her favour either for themselves or for their sons.

As Marie Gabrielovna owed much of her education to French novels, she was of course deeply in love. The object of her affections was a poor officer of the line who was, at the moment our tale opens, spending his leave on his adjacent property.

It need hardly be said that he burned with the same flame, and that Marie's parents having become aware of this mutual passion, had forbidden the young girl to think of him, and in consequence, when they met him they treated him as a person of quite inferior degree.

Our lovers corresponded and met in secret every day, sometimes in the pine woods and sometimes in the old chapel; they exchanged vows of eternal constancy, raged at fate, and formed the most contradictory plans; and conversing thus, they arrived, as was very natural, at the following resolution:—

"We cannot live apart, and as our cruel parents refuse their consent to our happiness, we must be happy without it."

Of course this clever idea occurred first to the young man, but when expressed by his beloved lips, it at once obtained the approval of Marie Gabrielovna.

The winter came and the meetings ceased, but letters grew still more frequent. Vladimir Nicolaïevich begged his lady love in every letter to give herself to him; to marry him in secret and to conceal their marriage for a time. Then one day they would throw themselves at the feet of their parents, who, touched by the heroic constancy and the misfortunes of the lovers, could not fail to open their arms and cry, "Come to our hearts."

Marie Gabrielovna took a long time to make up her mind; she rejected several plans of flight, but at last gave way.

On the appointed day she was to feign a headache, and at supper-time withdraw to her own room. The maid who waited on her, being in her confidence, was to accompany her mistress. They were both to slip out into the garden by the back door, and outside the gate they would find a sleigh waiting, in which they were to seat themselves, and, leaving the village of Nenarodovo behind, drive five versts to the village of Jadrino, and, going at once to the church, would find Vladimir waiting.

The night before the fateful day Marie Gabrielovna did not undress; she packed up some necessary clothes, wrote a long letter to a friend who was quite as romantic as herself, and a second to her parents. In this last she took farewell in the most moving terms, explained her flight—the necessity for which she regretted—by dwelling on her unconquerable love for her lover, and wound up by declaring that her happiness would not be complete till she should be able to throw herself at the feet of her parents.

Having secured her letter with a seal of Foulas work, on which were engraved two flaming hearts and a suitable inscription, she threw herself on her bed and fell into an uneasy slumber, waking suddenly with a start a dozen times, terrified by bad dreams.

Sometimes she dreamt that just as she was getting into the sleigh which was to take her to church her father appeared, and, seizing her by the arm, dragged her over the snow and threw her into a bottomless abyss, down which she fell with a frightful constriction of the heart. Then she would see Vladimir stretched on the turf, pale and covered with blood, while in a heart-breaking voice he implored her to give him her hand. Mixed with all this, strange and incomprehensible visions followed each other without order, like a phantasmagoria, until at last she rose paler than ever, and with a real headache this time.

Her father and mother remarked her pre-occupation, and their tender concern and the oft-repeated question, "What ails you? Are you ill, Marie?" broke her heart; she tried to relieve their anxiety by making an effort to appear cheerful, but without success.

The evening drew on. The thought that it was the last she should spend in the bosom of her family was heart-rending. She hardly seemed able to exist as under her breath she bade adieu to all the persons and things around her.

Supper was served. Her heart beat as if it would burst; in a trembling voice she declared she had no appetite, and, saying good night to father and mother, who kissed and blessed her as usual, she left the room.

It was only with difficulty she restrained her tears.

Having reached her chamber, she threw herself into an easy-chair and gave way to her grief.

Her maid tried to soothe her. All preparations were complete; in half an hour Marie was to leave for ever the paternal roof, her beloved room, and her peaceful girlhood.

Without the snow fell heavily, the wind whistled, the shutters rattled against the windows, everything seemed to foretell misfortune. Soon all within the house grew quiet—every one slept.

Marie wrapped a shawl round her, put on a wadded mantle, took up her jewel-

case, and reached the back entry. Her maid followed with two parcels, and they went out into the garden.

The snowstorm had not abated. The wind beat in their faces as if it would fain arrest the progress of the culprits. With difficulty they gained the bottom of the garden where the sleigh awaited them. The horses were stamping in the cold, and Vladimir's coachman was trying to soothe them.

He helped Marie and her maid to take their seats, put in their bundles and the jewel-case, took up the reins, and away they flew. Having thus confided Marie to her fate and the skill of the coachman, let us turn to our expectant bridegroom.

CHAPTER II

THE whole day long Vladimir had been on the move. In the morning he had had an interview with the priest in Jadrino, and had with great difficulty induced him to give his services; then he had gone off to hunt up witnesses among the neighbouring landed proprietors.

The first call he made was on an ensign, forty years of age, a M. Dravine, who consented with pleasure. This event, he declared, recalled his youthful exploits when he was in the Hussars. He kept Vladimir to dinner, taking no refusal, and assuring him that two other witnesses would soon turn up. And, sure enough, just as dinner was over M. Smith, a surveyor, with large moustaches and spurs, arrived, followed by the son of the Head of the District Police, a young fellow of seventeen, who had just got a commission in the Lancers.

These gentlemen not only acceded to Vladimir's request, but swore they were ready to sacrifice their lives for him.

Vladimir, having embraced them warmly, returned home to complete his preparations.

The shades of night having already fallen, he dispatched Terschka, his most trustworthy coachman, to Nenarodovo with his troika, giving him the most minute directions; and then he ordered a small sleigh with one horse for himself, and, taking the reins, set off alone for Jadrino, where Marie was due in an hour.

He was well acquainted with the road, and knew it was about a twenty minutes' drive. As soon as he reached the open country the wind had more power, and the snow fell so thickly that he could not see whither he was going. All signs of a track were effaced by a sheet of snow, and nothing could be seen through the murky, yellowish gloom except the white, whirling snowflakes. The sky and the earth were undistinguishable one from the other.

Vladimir soon found he was off the track and could not hit on the road again. The horse went on at hap-hazard, now on the top of a snowdrift, then down in a ditch, while the sleigh turned over constantly. Vladimir's one care was to keep in the right direction. It seemed to him half an hour had gone by, and yet there was no sign of Jadrino.

He crossed a field in which deep drains were cut; the snow fell thicker, the sky grew darker, the horse showed signs of failing strength. Great drops of sweat ran down Vladimir's face although he constantly sank up to his waist in snowdrifts.

At last he recognised the fact that he had lost his way completely, and, standing still, tried to find out where he was, looking round him in every direction, until he at last persuaded himself that he ought to turn to the right. This he immediately did. His horse could hardly move; it was an hour since he had set out. Jadrino must be close by; and yet he went on and on, and never came to the other side of the field.

Ditch after ditch—real ravines—to be crossed, the sleigh upsetting continually, time lost in putting it straight, the appointed hour at hand,—no wonder Vladimir became seriously uneasy.

At last a black spot appeared; he went towards it, and on reaching it found it was a wood.

"Thank heaven," thought he, "we are almost there!"

He skirted the wood, hoping to get beyond it and chance on a road which he knew of.

"Jadrino is only a few steps off," he said.

He soon found the road he was looking for, which led through the trees now despoiled by the winter of their leaves, but which still further increased the darkness. Here the wind had less power, the

road was more level, the horse plucked up spirit, and Vladimir grew calmer.

Still he went on and on, but no Jadrino. The trees never came to an end, and Vladimir perceived with terror that he was in a wood he had never seen before.

Despair seized him.

He whipped up his horse; the poor beast tried to trot, but its strength was not equal to its will, and despite all possible exertions on the part of its unlucky owner, it soon relapsed into a walk.

At length the trees began by degrees to grow thinner. He was getting out of the wood, but still no Jadrino. The hour must be close on midnight. Tears started to the eyes of the young man as he went blindly on. The night had cleared up, and at last a little hamlet consisting of five or six cabins appeared.

Vladimir went toward it. On reaching the first cabin he went up to the window and tapped at it.

In a few minutes the window opened, and in the frame the head of an old man with a white beard showed itself.

"What do you want?" asked the old man.

"How far is it to Jadrino?" said Vladimir.

"How far is it to Jadrino?" repeated the peasant.

"Yes."

"Not far, about ten versts."

At this answer Vladimir tore his hair, and stood there stunned, like a man condemned to death.

"Where do you come from?" asked the old man.

Vladimir hadn't the heart to reply.

"Can I have horses to take me to Jadrino?" he asked.

"Where could I get horses from?" returned the peasant.

"Can I at least have a guide? I will pay anything he asks."

"Wait a minute," said the old man, letting down the window, "I'll call my son, and he can show you the way."

Vladimir waited; but before a minute had passed he tapped at the window again. The white head reappeared.

"What do you want now?" asked its owner.

"What's keeping your son?" impatiently asked Vladimir.

"He'll be with you in a minute; he's just putting on his boots. If you are cold, come in and warm yourself."

"No, thank you; send me your son as quick as you can."

The door creaked, a boy appeared, stick in hand, and took the lead, sometimes showing the way, sometimes looking for it when it was hidden by snowdrifts.

"What o'clock is it?" asked Vladimir.

"It'll soon be day," said the boy.

Vladimir was silent.

The cocks were crowing, and the day had dawned when they reached Jadrino.

The church was closed.

Having paid his guide, Vladimir knocked at the priest's house. The troika was nowhere to be seen; what news awaited him?

Now we must go back to the good Gabriellovich's, and see what had happened there.

CHAPTER III

THE two old people rose and came into the sitting-room next morning just as usual, Gabriel Gabriellovich in nightcap and flannel-jacket, and Prascovia Petrovna in wadded dressing-gown.

The samovar was brought in. Gabriel Gabriellovich sent a little girl to ask Marie how she felt, and if she had had a good night.

The child soon came back and reported that her young mistress had slept badly, but that she felt better, and would soon be down.

At the same instant the door opened, and Marie Gabriellovna came in, and said good morning to her parents.

"How is your headache, Marie?" asked the old man.

"Much better, papa," answered Marie.

"Your stove was probably shut too soon, and the fumes gave you a headache."

"Possibly, mamma," replied Marie.

The day passed without incident, but as night came on Marie was not so well, and a messenger was sent into town for the doctor. On arriving he found the patient delirious and in a high fever, and for a fortnight poor Marie hovered between life and death.

No one in the house suspected the adventure the young girl had been through. She had burned all her letters; her maid had not breathed a word to any one, fearing the displeasure of her master and mistress. The priest, the

ensign on half-pay, the surveyor with the moustaches, and the nice young Lancer held their tongues; Terschka, the coachman, was no babbler even when tipsy, and so the secret never leaked out, although known to more than half a dozen people.

But Marie herself talked of it constantly in her delirium, only her words were so incoherent that her mother, who never left her bedside, gathered only one fact—that her daughter was dying of love for Vladimir Nicolaïevich, and that this was the cause of her illness. The mother consulted her husband, and asked the opinion of several neighbours, and the unanimous decision arrived at was that with regard to Marie Gabriellovna it was written in the book of fate that "Poverty is no crime, and that one lives with one's husband and not with his money," and so on and so on.

These aphorisms are of great use in all circumstances when good reasons are wanting to justify our course of action.

At length Marie began slowly to regain her health. For a long time Vladimir had not called at the house of Gabriel Gabriellovich, being deterred probably by the manner in which he had been formerly received there. It was therefore resolved that he should be sent for and told in so many words what unexpected happiness awaited him.

What was the astonishment of the inhabitants of Nenarodovo to receive in answer to this invitation a letter written by a man who was evidently half-mad. This letter said that the writer would never enter the house again, and that he implored them all to forget an unfortunate man whose only hope was in death.

In a few days they heard that he had joined the army. This was in 1812.

For some time no one dared tell Marie of this occurrence, and she never mentioned Vladimir; but some months later, on seeing his name in the list of those who had distinguished themselves at Borodino, and had been severely wounded, she fainted; and it was feared the shock would renew her illness, but happily no bad results followed.

Soon after, another blow fell; Gabriel Gabriellovich died, leaving Marie all his fortune. The inheritance was no consolation. Marie shared the grief of poor Prascovia Petrovna most sincerely, swore never to leave her, and soon took her

away from Nenarodovo, which recalled too many sad recollections. They went to reside on some property they possessed in the Government of —

There also was no lack of aspirants to the hand of the young, amiable and rich heiress, but to none did she give the slightest hope. Her mother from time to time tried to persuade her to choose a husband, but the young girl only shook her head pensively. Vladimir was no more; he had died in Moscow just before the French entered. Marie seemed devoted to his memory, preserving everything which could recall it to her—the books he had read; his sketches; the music and the verses copied for her use. The neighbours hearing this were astonished at her constancy, and expected with eagerness the arrival of the hero called by destiny to overcome the faithfulness of this new Artemisia.

We finished the war with glory; our regiments returned victorious from foreign lands; the people rushed to meet them; the air resounded with war-songs, picked up by the way; *Vive Henri IV.*, the airs from *Joconde*, and Tyrolean waltzes were played by every regiment. The officers who when setting out had been only boys, came back matured in the atmosphere of battle, and covered with medals and decorations. The soldiers talked gaily of the campaign, freely sprinkling their tales with French and German phrases. Never to be forgotten time! epoch of glory! With what a feeling of intoxication did Russian hearts beat at the thought of their native land; how sweet were the tears shed in families again united; how inseparable were our national pride and our love for the Emperor; and for him, what moments!

The women of Russia were no longer like themselves; their usual coldness had vanished; their enthusiasm knew no bounds; they went out to meet the victors, cheering, and waving their handkerchiefs.

And what Russian officer of that time did not look upon their welcome as the most precious reward?

Marie Gabrielovna and her mother were living, as we have said, in the Government of —, far from the route by which the Russians returned to their country. They saw nothing of this glorious home-coming. Nevertheless, the enthusiasm was, perhaps, greater in the

provinces and the villages than in the capital; the arrival of a single officer gave rise to great festivities, at which the townsman in frock-coat felt his nothingness.

We have said that, despite her coldness, Marie Gabrielovna had no lack of admirers; but they had all to give way when Colonel Bourmine arrived at her house, wearing the becoming uniform of the Hussars, the Cross of St. George dangling from his button-hole, and, still further, adorned by what the young girls all around called "an interesting wound."

He was about twenty-six years old, and was spending his leave at some country houses in the neighbourhood. Marie Gabrielovna soon distinguished him from the crowd of young men who surrounded her, and her air of depression disappeared by degrees. It could hardly be said that she tried to attract him, but a poet remarking what was going on in her mind could hardly have helped exclaiming—

"Se amor nonè, ch'è dunque?"

CHAPTER IV

BOURMINE was, indeed, a young man of much distinction, and worthy to inspire love; he possessed just the kind of character which attracts women.

He never put himself forward; looked on life with humorous carelessness, and with regard to Marie showed much tact and reticence, although it was evident that his heart and mind were fixed on her, no matter what she said or did. He appeared to be quiet and modest, but this must have been only in appearance, for it was well known that he had hitherto been rather wild. This reputation did not, however, seem to do him any harm with Marie Gabrielovna, who, like all young girls of her age, was only too ready to give absolution to such attractive failings.

But what aroused Marie's curiosity and fired her imagination most of all—more than the beauty of the young Hussar, more than his tender manner, more than his interesting paleness, more even than his arm in a sling—was his silence. She owned to herself that she pleased him, and he, with his intelligence and experience, must have been aware that she

was not indifferent to him, and yet, instead of falling at her feet and confessing his love, his reserve remained unbroken. What was it that froze on his lips the avowal that seemed ready to flow from them? Was it the timidity which is inseparable from real love? Or was it the pride and cunning of one who only played with hearts? Marie found this riddle hard to solve.

But having deeply reflected on this mystery, she came at length to the conclusion that timidity alone was the cause of his silence. Consequently she made up her mind to encourage the Colonel by more marked attentions, and even, if necessary, to betray her preference. All the materials necessary to bring her little romance to a happy ending were in her hands, and she waited with impatience for the moment when her lover should declare himself.

Marie's strategy had the desired effect; Bourmine went about as if in a dream; his eyes rested on Marie with so much fire that she was convinced the decisive moment was approaching. The neighbours talked already of the marriage as certain, and good Prascovia Petrovna was in the seventh heaven of delight at the coming realisation of all her hopes. One day as the old lady was alone in the sitting-room, laying "La grande patience," Bourmine came in, and asked at once for Marie Gabrielovna.

"She is in the garden," said the mother; "go and look for her, and I will wait for you both here."

As Bourmine went, Prascovia Petrovna crossed herself devoutly, thinking, "Who knows if everything may not be decided to-day?"

Bourmine found Marie by the pond, sitting under a willow tree, book in hand, and dressed in white, like a genuine heroine of romance. As soon as the conventional remarks acquaintances exchange on meeting were at an end, Marie let the conversation languish. This produced a slight embarrassment, which could only be relieved by the prompt and long-wished-for declaration.

Bourmine understanding this, explained that he had long been seeking an opportunity to open his heart to her, and asked if she would give him her attention for a few moments.

"I love you," he said; "I love you passionately."

Marie blushed, and looked down.

"But," went on the young man, "I have been most imprudent in indulging myself so long in the sweet habit of seeing and hearing you every day."

Marie thought of the first letter of Saint Preux.

"Now," continued Bourmine, "it is too late to harden myself against fate; the memory of you and of your beauty will henceforth be the consolation and the torture of my existence. I have still a painful duty to perform; I must reveal a dreadful secret to you, which places between us an insurmountable barrier."

"Such a barrier exists," said Marie, "on my side as well as on yours; do not blame your fate. You can never be mine."

"I know," said Bourmine, "that you have loved, but death and three years of separation have released you from your vows, and I feel I could have won your heart, dear Marie, in spite of this first love, if I had not been condemned by fate to unhappiness without end. I am married."

The young girl fixed on him a look of stupefaction; that Bourmine was already married was the very last idea that could have occurred to her.

"Yes, married!" said Bourmine; "married three years ago, and strange, unheard of, mad as it may appear, it is yet true, that I am ignorant who my wife is; that I do not know where she is, or if I shall ever see her again."

"What are you saying?" said Marie Gabrielovna. "It's not possible. But go on; I also—— But I shall tell you that afterwards—— For the love of God go on!"

CHAPTER V.

BOURMINE began again to speak in a voice half strangled with emotion.

"In the beginning of the year 1812," he said, "I was hastening to rejoin my regiment, then stationed at Vilna. Arriving very late at a post-station, I asked for a relay of horses as quickly as possible. While the horses were being put to a heavy snowstorm, with high wind, came on, and the station clerk, as well as the drivers, advised me to wait till the wind had abated. I listened without heeding,

hurrying up the stable-boys; it was as if some irresistible force were driving me on; and as soon as the sleigh was ready I took my seat and gave word to set off.

"We started, but the coachman had a fancy to try the track marked out on the frozen river, which was three miles shorter than the road. The banks were hidden by thick snow, and my coachman missing the opening by which we should have come out again on the high-road, we soon found ourselves in a region completely unknown to us. The tempest increased, and, after two hours' driving without having any idea where we were going, we perceived a light, towards which I ordered my coachman to direct his way.

"We soon reached a village; the light I had seen came from the village church, to which I drove up to inquire my way. The door was open, some sleighs were drawn up near the porch, and two or three persons stood on the threshold.

"'Here! here!' cried several voices.

"I suspected it was not me they were looking for, but, out of curiosity, went nearer.

"'Good heavens! how late you are!' said a young man; 'your bride has fainted, and the priest is at his wits' end.'

"A wicked idea came into my head. Accustomed as I was to the jokes played at the mess, this seemed to me too good a one to miss.

"I jumped out of the sleigh without speaking, but also without hesitating, and entered the church, which was lighted only by a single lamp. A young girl was sitting on a bench, leaning against the wall, in one corner; a maid, kneeling before her, was bathing her temples with a handkerchief dipped in vinegar.

"'God be praised!' said she, 'that you have got here at last; your delay has nearly killed my poor mistress.'

"The priest came next.

"'Sir,' said he, 'there is not an instant to lose; we may be interrupted at any moment. Let us not delay.'

"'But,' said I, 'you see that the lady can hardly stand.'

"'If she can say "Yes" it is all that is needed,' said the priest.

"There was still time to recede; I could still have told the truth; but the notion of having such an original adventure to tell of at the mess-table made me forget all other considerations; and, besides, I

thought nothing would be easier than to have such a marriage declared invalid.

"'Well, come on,' said I, 'since you are all of one mind.'

"The bride had already been led before the altar, some one supporting her, for she could not stand alone. I placed myself beside her, still muffled in my fur pelisse. The priest made no delay, and in a few seconds the necessary words were spoken.

"'There, you are married!' said the young man who had already spoken to me; 'embrace each other and away with you!'

"I asked for nothing better than to obey this behest. I opened my arms to my unknown wife; some one pushed the still half fainting girl closer to me; she lifted towards mine a face, of which in the darkness I saw nothing but its pallor. Suddenly her eyes fixed themselves on me, and, with a scream of terror which still rings in my ears, she exclaimed, 'Oh! it is not he!' and fell back fainting.

"The witnesses ran towards her, and, while they were taken up attending to her, some comprehension of the far-reaching effects of the action I had just committed came over me, and, rushing out of the church, I threw myself into the sleigh, and, telling the coachman to use his whip, we set off at a gallop."

"Good God!" cried Marie Gabrielovna, all pale and trembling; "and have you never found out what became of your unfortunate wife?"

"In Heaven's name, what ails you? What is the matter?" asked the young officer.

"I ask you," repeated Marie Gabrielovna, in an imperious voice, "if you have never found out what became of your unfortunate wife?"

"No, never," said Bourmine, subdued by the earnestness of the young girl. "I am ignorant of the name of the village in which I was married; I do not even recollect the name of the station at which I changed horses; and, besides, holding myself to be in no manner bound by a ceremony which in reality had nothing to do with me, I looked on the matter as a joke. A friend of mine, more sensible than myself, startled me by asserting that I was legally married, bound in this world and the next, to all eternity; but that, if I could find the young girl and induce her to join me in presenting a petition to

the Emperor, a divorce might be granted. if I had never found you, or, finding you, I searched for her everywhere, but all in vain. But, what is the matter with you, Marie; you look like death." had not loved you!"

"My God, my God!" cried the young girl, "it was you! Oh, Bourmine! think, Bourmine grew pale, and, with a cry, half anguish, half joy, threw himself at the feet of Marie Gabrielovna!

A FINE SHOT

CHAPTER I

WE were stationed at a small country town. It is well known what the life of an officer of the line consists of: in the morning, there is drill and the riding-school, dinner with the colonel of the regiment or in some inn kept by a Jew; in the evening, the punch-bowl and cards. In this little town there was not a single house that entertained; nobody expected to receive an invitation. We used to meet in each other's rooms, where we saw nothing but our own uniforms.

One single non-military individual was included in our society. He was a man of about five and thirty, for which reason we youngsters regarded him as an old fogey. His experience gave him a certain authority among us, just as his habitual gloominess, his rugged disposition, and his bitter tongue exercised a powerful influence over our young minds. A certain degree of mystery surrounded him; he looked like a Russian, but bore a foreign name. He had formerly served in the hussars, and with some distinction; nobody knew the reason which had made him leave the service and settle down in a wretched country town, where he led a life at once dull and expensive. He always went out on foot, and in all weathers. He was dressed in an old black overcoat. He kept open house for all the officers of the regiment; true, his dinners consisted of but two or three dishes cooked by an old servant soldier; but, to make up for it, his champagne flowed plentifully.

Nobody knew what were his means or resources, nor did any one venture to question him on the subject. His library consisted, to a great extent, of military works and novels, which he lent freely, without ever asking for them back again when any one forgot to return them. It

must be confessed that he, for his part, never returned a book which he had borrowed. His chief occupation was shooting with the pistol; the walls of his rooms were riddled with bullets and as full of holes as a wasps' nest. A rich collection of pistols was the only thing of luxury which his shanty contained; his control of the pistol was so perfect that, had he proposed to any of the officers of our regiment to let him hit a pear placed on his cap, there was not one of us but would have allowed him to do it without hesitation.

Often, in our conversations, we discussed duelling: Sylvio—for so I shall call him—never took part in the conversation when it turned upon this subject. If any one happened to ask him, "Have you ever been out?" he would answer sharply with a very curt "yes"; but he never gave any of the details of his duels, and it was easy to see that he found questions on this subject intensely disagreeable.

We were convinced that his conscience reproached him with respect to some victim of the deadly accomplishment of which he had possibly been a professor. It had never, however, entered our heads to suspect him of cowardice. Besides, there are men whose outward bearing of itself forbids all suspicion of this kind. An incident, however, occurred which surprised us all.

On a certain evening ten of us officers were dining with Sylvio; we had drunk freely, as usual. After dinner, we begged our host to take the bank and deal. He declined, as he very rarely played cards. At length, however, persuaded by our entreaties, he had the cards given to him, and, after throwing fifty ducats on the table, began to deal. We grouped ourselves round the table and the game began. As was his custom, he maintained a profound silence, never arguing,

and never offering any explanations. If the punter happened to make a mistake, he paid up the amount that was short; if the mistake was in his favour, he chalked the sum up.

We were quite familiar with his methods, and never tried to oppose his whims; but on this particular evening the company included a young officer who had only lately joined the regiment; presently, his attention wandered from the game, and he put on a double stake; Sylvio took the chalk and, according to his custom, wrote down the amount. The officer, thinking that Sylvio had made a mistake, asked for an explanation; Sylvio, however, without taking any notice, went on dealing. Thereupon the officer, losing patience, seized the brush and rubbed out the amount which he thought had been put down in error. Sylvio then took the chalk and wrote the figures again. The officer, excited both by the wine and the game, as well as the laughter of his comrades, thought himself deeply insulted, and in a fit of anger took up a candlestick and threw it at Sylvio's head. The latter, by a lucky chance, avoided being struck.

We all looked on in utter dismay.

Sylvio rose, pale with anger, and his eyes flaming.

"Leave the room, sir, I beg of you, and thank God that this has happened at my house and not elsewhere."

We felt no doubts as to what would follow this attack, and already looked upon our friend as a dead man. The officer went out, saying that, as he had insulted Sylvio, he was prepared to give him suitable satisfaction.

We continued playing for a few minutes afterwards; but, seeing that our host took no further interest in the game, we presently went back to our quarters, talking of the approaching vacancy in the regiment which could hardly fail to occur.

The next morning, when we met at the riding-school, we asked each other whether the unfortunate lieutenant was still alive. At that moment, to our great surprise, he came in.

We asked him how he had escaped; but, to our great astonishment, he replied that up to that moment he had received no communication from Sylvio.

We then proceeded to Sylvio's hut; we found him in the yard with a pistol in his hand, putting bullet after bullet into an

ace of spades which he had stuck up on the gate.

His face wore its usual expression as he greeted us, nor did he breathe a word with regard to the incident of the previous evening.

Three days elapsed and the lieutenant was still alive.

We asked each other if Sylvio did not mean to fight after all.

In the event, there was no duel: Sylvio contented himself with a few words of explanation from his adversary, and the matter was patched up.

This lowered Sylvio greatly in the estimation of the young men. Want of courage is the thing which finds least forgiveness in the early period of life, when bravery is thought the *ne plus ultra* of manly virtues and the excuse for all faults.

However, the affair gradually faded from our memories, and Sylvio recovered his influence over us.

I was the only one who could not make up my mind to resuming my former intimacy with him. Possessing by nature a romantic imagination, I had been more attached than any of the others to this man, whose life was an enigma, and who resembled in my eyes the hero of some mysterious romance. He was fond of me, or, if he was not, he at least when in my company dropped his habitual sarcasm, and talked freely, with simplicity and agreeableness, on every subject that turned up. But, after this unlucky evening, the thought of the stain inflicted on his honour, a stain which he had not desired to wipe out, refused to leave me, and prevented my being on the same terms with him as heretofore; I found it impossible to look him in the face.

Sylvio had too much penetration and was too experienced not to observe my coolness towards him and to divine its cause; he appeared to me to be distressed by it; at least, I noticed that on two or three occasions he seemed to wish to offer me an explanation. But I showed a reluctance to listen, and Sylvio forbore to give it.

From that day I only saw him in the presence of our comrades, and our private conversations ceased altogether.

Those who live in cities cannot enter into the little excitements so well known to the inhabitants of country towns and villages, such as, for instance, the arrival

of the post. On Tuesdays and Fridays our regimental bureau was filled with officers; one was expecting remittances, another newspapers, another letters. The parcels were usually opened on the instant, the news was circulated, and the office presented a most animated spectacle.

Sylvio had the privilege of receiving his letters through our office, and he, too, repaired thither on the days when the mail arrived. On one occasion, a packet was handed to him, the seal of which he broke with eager impatience.

As he read the letter his eyes flashed; but as everybody was occupied with his own affairs, no one noticed him.

"Gentlemen," said Sylvio, "the position of my affairs requires that I should leave here immediately. I shall start therefore to-morrow night, and I hope you will not refuse to come and dine with me for the last time. I expect you, too, most particularly," he added, addressing myself.

Upon which he went out abruptly, and we also left the office, agreeing among ourselves that we would accept his invitation.

I arrived at Sylvio's at the appointed hour, and found almost the whole regiment assembled; his goods, even to his furniture, were already packed up, and nothing was left but the walls riddled with bullets.

We sat down to table. Our host was in capital spirits, and his gaiety soon infected us all; the corks popped, the glasses were filled, and we drank the health of our departing host with the utmost cordiality.

It was late when we left the table; the company was beginning to retire, and Sylvio was bidding everybody farewell, when, just as I was about to follow the example of the others, he said to me in a low tone,—

"I want to speak to you."

I stayed behind.

When everybody had gone, we remained alone together, and began in absolute silence to smoke hard at our *chibouques*.

Sylvio was preoccupied; no trace of his nervous gaiety remained. A livid pallor, sparkling eyes, and clouds of smoke issuing from his mouth, gave him the appearance of a fiend.

Several minutes went by; at last Sylvio broke the silence.

"We shall perhaps never meet again,"

he said. "I wanted to have an explanation with you before I went away. Perhaps you have observed that I trouble myself very little as to the opinion which the others entertain about me; but with regard to yourself, I am fond of you, and I feel that it would be painful to me to leave you with a bad opinion of me."

He stopped and began to refill his pipe. I remained silent and kept my eyes lowered.

"You must have thought it strange, did you not," he continued, "that I did not demand reparation from that silly drunken fellow who threw a candlestick at my head? You know quite well that, having the choice of weapons and the privilege of shooting first, his life was in my hands, while mine did not run any very great risk. I might allege my magnanimity as the reason for my moderation, but I have no wish to tell a lie; if I could have punished him without risking my life, I should not have forgiven him."

I gazed at Sylvio with stupefaction; this avowal dumfounded me.

Sylvio continued,—

"Yes, it is quite true; I have not the right to hazard my life. Six years ago I received an insult, and the man who offered me that insult still lives."

My curiosity was aroused to the highest pitch.

"Did you not fight then?" I asked him. "The force of circumstances must no doubt have separated you."

"I did fight," replied Sylvio, "and here is the proof of our duel."

He took a forage-cap out of his hat-box and put it on his head; it had a bullet-mark about an inch from the front.

"You know," resumed Sylvio, "that I served in the — Hussars. You know my disposition, that I am accustomed to take the lead everywhere. This was my irresistible ambition in my younger days; at that time it was the fashion to be rowdy, and I was the rowdiest fellow in the whole army. We used to applaud the most resolute drinker; I drank more than the renowned P—, who was made famous in verse by D—. Duels in our regiment occurred more than daily, and in all these duels I was either a principal or a second. My comrades worshipped me, and the colonels, who were constantly being changed, looked upon me as an

incurable plague attached to the regiment.

"I was reposing on my laurels, when a young fellow, wealthy and of noble family—allow me to withhold his name—joined our regiment. Never in all my life have I seen a man more to be envied. Young, clever, handsome, with a light-hearted disposition, reckless courage, an inexhaustible purse, and, in addition, the noble name he bore—you can fancy the position he was capable of occupying among us.

"My sovereignty began to totter. Hearing me a great deal spoken of, he began to seek my friendship; I received his advances coldly, and he with absolute indifference dropped his pursuit of me. I conceived an aversion for him. His success with the regiment and with the ladies drove me to desperation.

"I determined to pick a quarrel with him; but he replied to my pointed remarks with remarks more witty and piquant than my own. I was forced to acknowledge this, and my anger increased. I lost my temper, and he chaffed me unmercifully.

"At last, during a ball at the house of a Polish nobleman, seeing him the object of attention on the part of all the ladies and particularly of the hostess, who was on terms of intimacy with me, I whispered a most insulting remark in his ear. This time he lost control of himself and gave me a slap in the face.

"We drew our swords instantly; the ladies fainted. Eventually they managed to separate us, and we set off that night for the place agreed upon for the duel.

"The morning broke: I was at the appointed spot with my three seconds; with feverish impatience I awaited my opponent, and would have hastened his arrival if I could. The spring sun was just appearing above the horizon and its warmth beginning to make itself felt, when I perceived my antagonist arriving on foot, carrying his military jacket on the end of his sabre, and accompanied by only one second.

"We went forward to meet him; he came towards us, holding in his hand his cap, which was full of wild cherries.

"The seconds measured out twelve paces.

"I had the privilege of shooting first; but my pulse beat so wildly that I did not feel sure of my aim, and begged that he would fire the first shot.

"He declined.

"We decided to settle the matter by drawing lots.

"The lot fell to this favourite of Fortune.

"He aimed and pierced my cap.

"It was now my turn to fire. At last I held his life in my hands. I looked eagerly at him, trying to discover if he showed the least trace of nervousness. Calmly eating his cherries out of his cap, and spitting out the stones, which fell close to my feet, he awaited my shot.

"His coolness exasperated me.

"What necessity was there, I asked myself, for killing a man to whom life appeared a matter of such indifference?

"A stupid idea crossed my brain, and I lowered my pistol.

"I think you cannot be prepared for death,' I said to him, 'taking your breakfast in so pleasant a fashion. Allow me to let you finish your meal.'

"You are not disturbing me in the least, sir, but do as you please. You have a shot to fire at me; whether you shoot now or later on, I shall be at your service.'

"I turned to the seconds and observed,—

"I shall not shoot to-day.'

"And the duel was over.

"I left the service and retired to this little town, where not a day has passed since without my thinking of my revenge. Now the hour has arrived."

Silvio drew from his pocket the letter which he had received that morning, and gave it to me to read.

Some one—his man of business as I imagined—wrote to him that the person in question was about to be married to a charming young lady.

"You can guess," continued Sylvio, "who is meant by the person in question. Well, I am starting for Moscow, and we shall see whether he faces death with as much coolness to-morrow or the day after, as on the day when he ate the cherries."

Saying these words, Sylvio rose, threw his cap on the ground, and began to pace up and down the room like a caged tiger.

I followed him with my eyes without stirring; strange and contradictory thoughts jostled in my mind.

The servant came in, saying that the horses were ready. Sylvio grasped my hand and we embraced each other; he took his seat in a little cart containing but

two articles of luggage; a travelling-bag and a case of pistols.

The cart went off at a gallop.

CHAPTER II

SEVERAL years had elapsed; the circumstances of my business obliged me to live in a small village in the district of N—. Although I found plenty of occupation at home, none the less I missed my former life of careless gaiety. The thing to which above all I was unable to get accustomed was passing the long winter and spring evenings in absolute solitude. I managed to find ways of killing time until the dinner-hour, either in conversation with the *starosta*,* in visiting my fields, or inspecting the new buildings which I was having put up; but, from the moment that the sun set, I did not know what to do with myself.

I already knew by heart the few books which I had been able to find in desks, under chests of drawers and in my lumber-room; all the stories that my housekeeper Kirolovna could remember had been told me long ago; the tales related by my villagers had produced no effect latterly save that of making me feel melancholy. For a time I had recourse to cherry-brandy; but my head could not stand this beverage, and, to tell you the truth, I began to fear that I should become melancholy-mad, the worst kind of intoxication that I know, and which abounds in this district.

Near neighbours I had none, with the exception of two or three hard drinkers, whose conversation consisted for the most part of hiccoughs and sighs; finally, I told myself that the best thing I could do would be to dine as late as possible and go to bed early.

Consequently, I lengthened my days and shortened my evenings.

About two miles from my house lay a wealthy estate belonging to a Countess B—; but the only person who lived there was the bailiff. The Countess had come there for a bare month in the first

year of her marriage. However, in the second spring of my solitary life, a report got about that the Countess was coming with her husband to spend the summer in the country; and in point of fact they appeared at the beginning of June.

The arrival of wealthy neighbours is an exciting event for the dull folk of a country district. The owners of property and their servants talk of nothing else for two months before they come and for three months after they depart. For myself, I confess that the advent of my young and beautiful neighbour had caused a great commotion in my life, and I burned with impatience to see her. Consequently, on the first Sunday after their arrival, I made my way to their residence to pay my respects to their Excellencies as their nearest neighbour and very humble servant.

The footman showed me into the Count's apartment and left me there while he went to announce me. The immense room was most luxuriously furnished. Book-cases were ranged along the walls, each surmounted by a bronze bust; the marble chimney-piece was decorated with a large mirror. A green cloth covered the entire floor, and over this green cloth were spread rugs. Having dropped all the luxurious habits in my little out-of-the-way abode, and not having seen for a long time the evidences of other people's wealth, I experienced a feeling almost amounting to trepidation, and awaited the Count's arrival with the agitation shown by a petitioner from the country who is expecting an interview with a Cabinet Minister. The door opened, and a man of two or three and thirty, with a fine and noble face, entered the room.

The Count—for it was he—approached me with a frank and friendly air. I tried to compose myself and stammered some words of apology; but the Count cut me short.

We sat down: his easy and lively conversation soon banished my uncouth shyness. I had already begun to recover my self-possession, when suddenly I saw the Countess enter, and I felt more nervous than ever.

She was indeed a very beautiful woman.

The Count introduced me to his wife: I tried to make myself agreeable; but the more I wanted to be at my ease, the more embarrassed I felt.

* The mayor of the village, who, in spite of this eminent position, is often a serf.

The Count and Countess, in order to give me time to recover from my nervousness, began to talk to each other, and ended by treating me as they would have done an old acquaintance, that is to say, without ceremony. During their conversation I examined first the books that were on the table, and then the pictures hanging on the walls. I am no judge of pictures, but one of them attracted my attention.

It was a Swiss landscape; but it was not the view represented nor its execution that struck me, but a couple of bullet holes close together, which had pierced through the picture.

"The deuce! but that was a fine shot," I remarked to the Count.

"Yes," he replied, "a remarkable shot, was it not? And you," he asked, "do you shoot well?"

"Passably well," I replied; "with a pistol that I know, I am pretty certain of lodging a bullet in a playing-card at thirty paces."

"Really!" said the Countess, who was listening with the utmost attention. "And you, my dear," she added, turning to her husband, "could you do what this gentleman can?"

"We will try," said the Count. "There was a time when I possessed a certain amount of skill in shooting, but I haven't fired a pistol for four years."

"In that case," I replied, "I will make you a bet that you don't hit a card even at twenty paces. Pistol shooting requires daily practice, as I know by experience. I was one of the best shots in my regiment; well, it happened once that, my weapons having gone to be repaired, I was a month without practice. Just imagine it, your Excellency, the first time that I resumed my shooting I missed a bottle at twenty-five paces four times running. Oh! no, it is a thing you must not neglect, or you go to pieces directly. The best shot I ever knew used to split three bullets on the edge of a knife every day before dinner. He accustomed himself to do that just as regularly as he took his glass of brandy before his soup."

The Count and his wife appeared very glad that I had thrown myself into the conversation.

"And how used he to shoot?" the Count asked me.

"It is very simple," I replied. "If he happened to see a fly upon the wall—you

were laughing, Countess, but I assure you I am telling you the truth—he would exclaim, 'A pistol, Cousma.' The servant would bring him a pistol ready loaded; he would scarcely take time to aim, and—paf!—the fly was flattened against the wall."

"Wonderful!" said the Count; "and what was his name?"

"Sylvio, your Excellency."

"You knew Sylvio?" cried the Count with a start: "you knew Sylvio?"

"Of course I knew him; we were friends. He was admitted to our regiment as a comrade; I have heard nothing of him for five years; but, from what you say, I suppose you knew him yourself, your Excellency?"

"Yes, I knew him, and knew him well, I assure you. If you were his friend, as you say, he must have told you a rather strange story."

"You mean about an insult he received at a ball?"

"Yes—Did he tell you the name of the man who insulted him?"

"No, your Excellency, never."

Then, suddenly struck with an idea and looking at the Count, I said,—

"It was you?"

"Yes, it was I," replied the Count with great agitation, "and that picture with the hole in it is the souvenir of our last meeting."

"Oh! my dear, don't tell our visitor about that," said the Countess; "you know the story always upsets me."

"No," interrupted the Count; "he knows how I insulted his friend; let him hear now how his friend took his revenge."

The Count pushed forward an armchair. I sat down, and listened with the most eager interest to the following narrative:—

"Five years ago I was married. The first month, the honeymoon, was spent in this village; with this house are bound up my happiest moments and also my saddest recollections.

"One evening the Countess and I were out riding, when suddenly her horse stumbled; the Countess was alarmed, jumped to the ground, throwing me the reins, and set off on foot to the house.

"When I reached home, I saw a travelling-carriage at the door. I was told that a visitor was waiting for me in my room who declined to give his name, but had answered that his business concerned myself alone. I therefore entered

the room and saw in a corner of it a man with a long beard and covered with dust. He was standing near the fire-place.

"I stopped for a moment to examine him.

"'You do not know me, Count?' he asked, in a sinister tone of voice.

"'Sylvio!' I cried.

"And I confess that I felt my hair stand up on end.

"'It is my turn to fire,' said he; 'are you ready?'

"He had his pistol in his belt.

"I nodded my head in token that I recognised his claim; and, measuring out twelve paces, placed myself in a corner of the room, begging him to shoot at once, before my wife came in.

"'I can't see here,' said he; 'have some lights brought.'

"I called the servant and told him to light the candles; then I closed the door behind him and resumed my place, entreating him again not to keep me waiting.

"He took aim, and I counted these seconds, thinking of my wife.

"A terrible moment passed.

"Sylvio let his hand fall.

"'It is a pity the pistol is loaded with a bullet and not with a cherry-stone; it is heavy and tires my hand.'

"Then, after a minute which appeared to me an age, he said,—

"Really, it would not be a duel but a murder; I am not accustomed to shooting at an unarmed man. Let us begin again and draw lots who shall fire first.'

"My head swam; I think at first I did not consent. I recollect, however, that we loaded our pistols, and folded up two pieces of paper which we placed in the cap which had been pierced by me.

"Chance favoured me; again I drew the first shot.

"'You have the devil's own luck, Count!' said he, with a smile which I shall never forget.

"I don't know how it happened, but when I shot, instead of hitting my opponent, I put my bullet through this picture."

The Count pointed with his finger to the picture. His face was purple; that of the Countess, on the contrary, was lividly pale.

I could not restrain an exclamation.

"Sylvio raised his pistol again and took aim. This time the expression of his

face told me plainly that I had no mercy to expect.

"Suddenly the door opened. Marie ran in, and with a cry of terror threw herself on my neck.

"Her appearance restored me my presence of mind.

"I made an effort and burst out laughing.

"'You foolish child!' I said; 'don't you see that we are amusing ourselves? It is a matter of a wager. How can you get into such a state of terror? There, go and drink a glass of water, and when you come back I will introduce you to an old friend of mine.'

"But she wouldn't believe me.

"'In Heaven's name, sir, is it the truth?' she asked, addressing the gloomy Sylvio. 'Is it true that you are amusing yourselves for a wager?'

"'Yes, yes,' said Sylvio, 'we are only in joke. It is the Count's habit to joke. One day, by way of a joke, he gave me a slap in the face; another day, still in joke, he made this hole in my cap with a bullet; and, still by way of a joke, he has just missed me for the second time. It is my turn to joke now.'

"And with these words, for the third time he raised his pistol level with my breast.

"Marie understood the whole truth and threw herself at his feet.

"'Oh!' cried I, 'are you not ashamed?'

"Then I continued angrily,—

"'Come, sir, will you put an end to the matter? Will you fire or not?'

"'No,' answered Sylvio.

"'What do you mean?'

"'No, I am satisfied; I have witnessed your agony and terror. Twice I have made you shoot at me, and twice you have missed me. You will recollect it; I leave you to your conscience.'

"And he stepped towards the door to leave the room.

"But as he reached the threshold he stopped, turned round to the picture, took aim carefully, fired, and then went out. That I might have no doubts as to his skill, he had put his bullet exactly over mine.

"My wife had fainted.

"My servants did not venture to stop him, and only stared at him in alarm as he passed by.

"When he reached the outer door, he

called his *isvoschik* and went off without giving me a moment's time to collect my thoughts."

The Count ceased.

I had now heard the sequel to that romantic story the commencement of which had so much interested me.

I never saw Sylvio again.

Report ran that when, in 1820, Alexander Ypsilanti gave the signal for the Greek Revolution, Sylvio was in command of a regiment of Hellenes and had been killed at the battle of Dragachan.

THE COFFIN-MAKER

CHAPTER I

THE last of the household belongings of the coffin-maker, Adrian Prokorof, was placed in a hearse, which he had converted temporarily into a furniture van, and was transported, this being the fourth and final journey, by two lean black horses, from Basmana to Nikitzky, where he was going to reside with his family.

After closing his shop, he nailed up on the door a notice intimating that the house was to be sold or let, and set off himself on foot for his new abode.

As he approached nearer and nearer to the yellow house which had for so long been the object of his ambition, and which he had just purchased for a fairly large sum, the old coffin-maker was much surprised that he did not feel so joyful as he had expected to do.

When he crossed the strange threshold and found his new dwelling in a state of the greatest disorder, he regretted his old abode, where, for eighteen years, everything had been so carefully looked after. Exasperated by this discovery, he began to scold his daughters and his servant for their idleness, and set about working himself, more with a view to making them ashamed of themselves than anything else.

Presently all was in order—the glass case in which the images of the saints were kept, the sideboard, the table, the sofa and the bed occupied the places fixed upon beforehand in an inner room. In the kitchen and the parlour were placed the products of his industry, namely, coffins of various sizes and colours. The mourning cloaks, funeral hats, and Russian otters were hung up in the cupboards. Lastly, the presence of all this mortuary apparatus was indicated to passers-by by a sign depicting a fat Cupid holding

in his hand a torch reversed, together with the following inscription:—

COFFINS MADE HERE,
PLAIN OR COLOURED, WITH OR WITHOUT
ORNAMENTATION.
ON HIRE,
OR, IF REQUIRED,
OLD ONES REPAIRED AS GOOD AS NEW.

Having completed the general arrangement, Adrian's daughters withdrew to their own room. As for the hero of our story, having made a final inspection of his whole abode from attic to cellar, he sat down by the window and lighted the tea-urn.

The reader is no doubt aware that Shakespeare and Sir Walter Scott habitually represent their grave-diggers and coffin-makers—two professions which are in close touch with each other—as persons of gay and humorous disposition. This produces the advantage of striking the imagination by the contrast between the persons and their occupation, and consequently impresses us more forcibly.

Our respect for truth unfortunately forbids our following their example, and we are obliged to confess that the disposition of our hero was in complete harmony with the trade which he pursued. He was gloomy and pensive, never opening his mouth except to scold his daughters when he found them unoccupied, or to raise the price of his goods to those who had the misfortune—sometimes, perhaps, the good fortune—to need them.

Adrian Prokorof, then, was seated near the window and drinking his seventh cup of tea with his habitual gloominess, thinking all the while of that heavy rain of the previous week, which, just as it was starting, had drenched the funeral procession of an old brigadier whom he was conduct-

ing to his last resting-place. This rain had caused an immense amount of damage; several cloaks had been shrunk, several hats beaten out of shape as the result of this shower. He foresaw unavoidable expense as the result of this untoward incident—an expense all the more alarming as his goods had long since seen their best days, and his stock-in-trade really required renewal from top to bottom.

He had, it is true, one hope left, that of making good all his losses over the funeral of Troukina, a wealthy shopkeeper, who for the last year had been reported to be dying. Troukina, however, still lived and obstinately declined to die, and, as she lived in Bargoulay, close, that is to say, to the house which Adrian had just quitted, the latter thought with good reason that her heirs, who had promised to employ him as undertaker, would fail to keep their word, now that he had left the neighbourhood, and would engage the services of his successor in the business.

All this was very annoying, it must be allowed, and Adrian not being of a light-hearted disposition by nature, as we have already said, this concatenation of unfortunate circumstances had deepened his air of melancholy into one of absolute lugubriousness.

His thoughts, which had rendered his features so gloomy, were interrupted by three knocks at his door given after the manner of Freemasons.

"Who's there?" asked the coffin-maker.

Without any reply being given, the door opened, and a person whom Adrian at once recognised as a German workman entered the room, and, with a cheerful air, approached the master of the house.

"Pardon me, my dear neighbour," said the new-comer, with a most grotesque pronunciation of Russian; "pardon me if I am disturbing you, but I wished to make your acquaintance without delay."

Although Adrian looked at him in a manner that was the reverse of encouraging, the new-comer went on,—

"I am a bootmaker by trade, and my name is Gottlieb Schultz; I live in the house opposite yours. I am celebrating my silver wedding to-morrow, and I have come to invite you and your two daughters to dine with us."

The invitation was favourably received. Adrian's countenance grew a shade less

long, and, begging the bootmaker to sit down beside him, he asked him if he would take a cup of tea.

The bootmaker accepted.

So good-natured and frank was the disposition of Schultz that after a few minutes' conversation the two neighbours were on as familiar terms as if they had been old friends.

"How is the boot trade?" asked Adrian.

"Oh! pretty so-so," replied Schultz; "I have no complaint to make, although my business has not the same advantages as your own, for the living can do without boots, but the dead can't do without coffins."

"That is perfectly true," answered Adrian; "however, if the living cannot afford to buy boots they go barefooted, no doubt, but that only means to you a loss of profit; whereas, in my case, if the dead man is a pauper, I have to furnish him with a coffin gratis, and that means money out of pocket."

Schultz gave an affirmative nod of the head.

The conversation lasted an hour, more or less, but, as it contained nothing that would greatly interest our readers, we will ask them to be content with what we have given as a specimen.

At last the bootmaker rose and took leave of the coffin-maker, begging him once more not to forget his invitation for the morrow.

The following day, as the last stroke of noon sounded, Prokorof and his daughters were ready. I shall not attempt to describe Adrian's caftan, nor the fantastic costumes of Accoulina and Daria, departing in this respect from the custom of modern novelists. I do not, however, think it out of place to inform the reader that the two young ladies wore yellow hats and red boots, adornments which usually constituted the base and pinnacle of their Sunday dress.

When the father and his two daughters arrived at the bootmaker's, they found his small abode crowded with guests, the majority of whom were German artisans with their wives and apprentices. By way of government officials there was a Finnish *boudschnik** answering to the

* An employé of the Russian police, who stands at the corner of the streets in a wooden erection, twice the size of one of the Paris omnibus offices. His chief duty is to arrest and lock up drunkards, vagrants, and

melodious name of Yourko, who, in spite of his humble employment, had contrived to win the special favour of the master and mistress of the house. He had discharged his duties with fidelity for twenty-five years. The conflagration of 1812 which devastated the capital had not spared Yourko's yellow sentry-box; but after the French had left Moscow, another had been built for him of a grey colour with white pillars, and Yourko, clothed in his cuirass of druggert, and still armed with his old halberd, which he had rescued from the flames, resumed his march up and down in front of his new abode just as he had tramped to and fro before the old one.

Yourko was acquainted with all the Germans who lived near the gates of Nikitzky. Some of them, by right of compulsory hospitality, had occasionally spent the Sunday night in his establishment.

Adrian at once struck up an acquaintance with the *boudschnik* as being a man who might on occasion prove useful to him, and, when the guests seated themselves at table, placed himself next to him.

M. and Madame Schultz and their daughter, Mademoiselle Lotchen, a girl of seventeen, helped the cook to serve up the dinner, in which beer played the principal part by way of beverage.

Yourko ate enough for four and drank in proportion. Adrian did not come behind him in either respect, though he fell to work with his usual melancholy; his two daughters conducted themselves in emulation of each other, and stood on ceremony as each dish was offered to them, and each glass of beer poured out.

All of a sudden the host, requesting the guests to be silent in order that none of the effect should be lost, uncorked a bottle of champagne with a report that was received with acclamations all the more enthusiastic as it was quite unexpected.

Let us hasten to say, in case any of our readers should be astonished at the lavishness of our German artisan, that the champagne which he uncorked came

even those who sleep in the streets at night. On the next day they are brought before the magistrate, who sentences them, according to the gravity of their misdemeanour, to sweep for one, two, or three days, the streets in which they were found.

neither from the banks of the Marne nor of the Saône, but merely from the banks of the Don.

This circumstance did not prevent the bootmaker from proposing in loving terms the health of his dear Lisa, a toast which was echoed by the company with enthusiasm.

This compliance with his wishes doubtless touched the worthy German's heart deeply; for almost immediately, uncorking a second bottle of champagne and filling the glasses afresh, he exclaimed,—

"To the health of my dear guests!"

The guests thanked him in their turn, and emptied their glasses once more.

From this general toast they passed to that of individuals. They drank to the health of each guest, to the health of Moscow and a dozen small German towns; then they passed on to towns in general and villages in particular; and finally, that nobody might be forgotten, they drank the health of artisans in the mass.

Adrian drank without stint and became, comparatively speaking, so merry that his daughters could hardly recognize their father.

Suddenly a huge baker raised his glass and drank to his fellow-workmen. The toast was received with enthusiasm; the guests saluted one another, for everybody was included in the toast. The tailor bowed to the bootmaker, the bootmaker to the tailor, the baker bowed to the tailor and the bootmaker, every one bowed to the baker, and so on.

Adrian alone, amid this general fraternizing, merry though he was, did not drink the health of anybody, albeit he did not miss the opportunity of emptying his glass.

His silence did not escape his neighbour Yourko.

"Why do you not drink anyone's health, my dear neighbour Adrian? Since we are all drinking the health of our customers, do you drink to yours."

This suggested an idea to Adrian, who laughed a ghastly laugh, and rising unsteadily on his legs, exclaimed in fairly coherent tones,—

"You are right, neighbour Yourko. To the health of my corpses, and good luck to them!"

But nobody responded to this toast, which, no doubt, the company regarded as

somewhat sacrilegious, and the coffin-maker sat down amid a chilling silence.

The guests continued to drink, though the somewhat unseasonable toast proposed by Adrian had interrupted the series, which, but for that, would probably have continued until all the guests were under the table.

CHAPTER II

IT was almost night before the company separated, the majority of them drunk, all of them more or less under the influence of liquor.

The stout baker, and his friend and neighbour the bookbinder, whose face was as red as a morocco pocket-book, re-warehoused Yourko, who could not walk without their support, in the sentry-box with which he had made them acquainted more than once, quoting to each other the Russian proverb: "It is a loan for a return."

Perhaps, to be more exact, they ought to have said: "It is a return for a loan." But in the condition of mind at which they had arrived one does not look for precise accuracy; and they went off laughing, which was a sure proof that they were satisfied with their quotation, inexact though it was under the particular circumstances.

The coffin-maker also returned home. Whenever Adrian got drunk he turned savage as well. With the persistence shown by men when intoxicated, who see an insult where for the most part none is intended, and who inflame it by turning it over in their minds, Adrian did not cease to harp upon the rudeness of the company in not having received his toast with the same favour as those which preceded it.

"What does it mean?" he fumed to himself, "and why wouldn't those fellows do me justice? Is my position less honourable than their own, and is a coffin-maker brother to the hangman? Refuse to drink the health of my corpses! Hang it all! the dead are as good as the living, it seems to me; they have in the first place a great advantage over the latter, namely, that death has cured them of all

their faults. The dead leave the living in peace at any rate, while the living often torment the dead even in their graves. Death to the living! Long life to the dead!"

He stumbled into his house and went up to his room, and, without taking any notice of the servant who was helping him to undress, still continued to pursue the same idea,—

"I was intending to invite them to supper as a return for their hospitality, but the moment they treated me in that way I felt myself absolved from the necessity of showing them any consideration. Let them stop with their customers, and I will stop with mine. It is my customers and not theirs whom I will invite to dinner. My dead shall be my guests; I will touch glasses with them, and, if they do not reply to my toast, at least I shall know the cause of their silence."

Then, laughing as a skeleton might laugh,—

"It is settled, I will invite my corpses to dinner," he repeated.

"Why, sir, what are you talking about?" cried the servant.

"Or to supper, if they prefer it," Adrian went on.

"Don't, sir, it's enough to make one shudder! invite your corpses to supper!"

"Yes, because supper will suit them better: midnight is their hour. Let them come to supper with me at midnight to-morrow, I shall expect them."

"Oh! be quiet, sir! your corpses to-morrow at midnight! Is it possible for wine to produce such ghastly ideas as this!"

"At midnight I said, and I repeat it; to-morrow, to-morrow!"

And, as he was now nearly undressed, the servant pushed him on to the bed and ran off, making the sign of the cross as she went.

She had hardly closed the door of the room before her master was already snoring like a double-bass.

Adrian was aroused at an early hour. The merchant Troukina had died during the night, and her head clerk had come by direction of the heirs, in faithful compliance with the arrangement entered into with the coffin-maker, to inform him that his services were required.

Adrian gave the clerk six copeks as a reward for the good news, dressed himself

in haste, hired an *isvoschik*, and was driven to the dead lady's house at Bargoulay.

The corpse, yellow as wax, was lying on the table.

The room was crowded with relations, friends, people belonging to the house, and acquaintances.

The windows were open and the candles lighted; the priests were chanting the prayers for the dead. Adrian approached Madame Troukina's nephew, her nearest relative, a young merchant dressed in the latest fashion, and promised him that his aunt's coffin should leave nothing to be desired, and should be despatched at once, together with the tapers and other accessories required for the ceremony.

Madame Troukina's heir—it may be mentioned in passing that the estate was a large one—told him that he would leave the matter to his own honesty, that he would not bargain with him, and that he trusted entirely to his good faith.

Adrian thanked him and promised to treat him as a friend; then he looked at the clerk, giving him to understand by means of a wink that he should not be forgotten; after which he went away in order to give instructions for the prompt delivery of all things needful.

In accordance with the promise given by Adrian, who was a man of his word, everything was ready and despatched that evening.

At eleven o'clock he came out from the house of Madame Troukina, whose body he had just laid out, and returned on foot to his new abode.

Although the road was long and the night dark, he accomplished his journey without misadventure.

He was not more than twenty yards from his own house when he saw, by the rays of the moon which was beginning to rise, a sort of shadow which was going in with him by the street door.

"Who the deuce can that be?" Adrian asked himself, "and who can be coming to my house at this hour?"

At this moment it struck the quarter to twelve.

"Can it be a burglar?" he muttered; "or rather—can it be a lover coming for one of my daughters? That is quite possible."

He had stopped to reflect at about fifteen paces from his house, when he saw a second figure, which, taking the

same way that the first had done, was entering with him by the little door.

Adrian stepped forward with the intention of questioning the new-comer; but the latter also stopped, and perceiving Adrian, came up to him and politely raised his hat, which was a two-peaked one.

Though Adrian did not recollect this man's name, his face was not altogether unfamiliar to him.

He therefore observed politely,—

"If you are coming to see me, sir, come indoors, I beg you; we can talk better there than in the street."

"Don't stand on ceremony with me, my dear sir, I entreat you," replied the new-comer in a hollow voice; "please, however, to pass before me."

"To show you the way," replied Adrian courteously.

And, hat in hand, he preceded the visitor.

The street door, to Adrian's great surprise, was open.

He mounted the stairs, followed by the stranger.

Adrian opened the door of his room and stood in stupefaction on the threshold.

His room was full of corpses.

The moon lighted up their wan and yellow faces; their mouths were half-open, their eyes half-closed, their noses pointed. Adrian began to tremble in all his limbs as he recognized each corpse that he had laid in its coffin.

As for the last comer, who had entered with him and whose face did not appear quite unfamiliar, it was that of the brigadier at whose funeral that heavy shower of rain had occurred which had done such cruel damage to his stock-in-trade.

On seeing the coffin-maker they all bowed and thanked him, with the exception of one woman, for whom Adrian had been obliged to make a coffin gratis, the corpse herself being too poor to incur the expense, and who, therefore, did not venture to come near him, lest he should reproach her.

She remained, therefore, modestly in her corner.

The other corpses were very well dressed.

The ladies had flounced dresses and hats or bonnets of the fashion that had prevailed at the time they were buried. The men were either in uniform or in civilian's

clothes; their beards, however, had not been trimmed.

The merchants wore their Sunday caftans. "Here we are, Prokorof, as you see," said the brigadier, speaking on behalf of the whole company, "having come at your invitation. We have left behind only those who have lost their flesh—those who have fallen to pieces. One only of them insisted on coming all the same, in spite of our remonstrances."

At these words the corpses made a gap in their circle, through which Adrian saw advancing a small skeleton from which the flesh had been completely stripped and whose mouth smiled at him pleasantly. Fragments of cloth hung from him like the scarecrows that are placed in the fields to frighten away the birds. His feet-bones rattled in his boots, producing a ghastly clatter.

"Don't you know me?" said the skeleton to Adrian.

The coffin-maker remained dumb, either because in point of fact he did not recognise the corpse, or because his tongue clove to his palate with terror.

The skeleton went on,—

"What, my dear Prokorof, you don't remember me?"

The coffin-maker murmured with an effort,—

"What? who?"

"An old soldier of the guard," continued the skeleton: "Kouvilkin, to whom you sold your first coffin in 1799; I gave you a handsel for the job, and, as I have done you no harm, you owe me a shake of the hand for it."

And the skeleton advanced towards Prokorof, holding out his hand.

Prokorof, half dead with fright, drew back. But as the little skeleton still advanced, while Prokorof continued to retire, the coffin-maker soon reached the wall and was obliged to stop.

"Ha! ha!" said the skeleton, "I have got you at last."

But when Adrian saw those bony hands and those fleshless arms about to clasp him to the open-work of its breast, he was seized with such a paroxysm of terror that he gave a violent push to the little skeleton, which tumbled over and broke in a thousand pieces on the floor.

On seeing this accident, all the corpses began to utter unearthly cries, abusing the unhappy Prokorof and asking him if it was his custom to invite people to

supper at midnight, and to disturb them from their occupations only to welcome them with blows and to reduce them to fragments in the way that he had just done.

Their cries reached such a pitch, their gestures indicated so great exasperation, and their faces expressed such menacing indignation, that poor Adrian, lacking the strength either to remain or to run away, fell down unconscious on top of the bones of the soldier of the guard.

His swoon was so profound that he did not recover from it until nine next morning.

When he opened his eyes, he found himself in his bed; his servant was preparing the *samovar*.

Though his eyes were open and he was in bed, and though, with the exception of his servant his room was deserted, Adrian remained for a moment silent and shuddering, to such a degree was he haunted by the thought of Troukina, the brigadier, and the soldier of the guard.

Consequently, being unable to utter a single word, he waited until Axenia—this was the servant's name—spoke to him first.

Axenia happened to turn round, and saw that her master's eyes were open.

"Ah! thank Heaven!" she said, "I thought you were never going to awake this morning, Adrian Prokorof! Do you know that it is nine o'clock?"

Going up to her master, she handed him his dressing-gown, but seeing that he still remained silent, she continued,—

"Ivan, the tailor, has come; also the *boudschnik* Yourko has sent to tell you not to forget that to-day is the entertainment of the chief of the district police; but, my word, you were sleeping so soundly that I did not like to awake you."

Adrian made an effort and asked,—

"And has any one come from the dead woman?"

"What dead woman?" said Axenia.

"From Troukina, the merchant; you know all about it."

"Good gracious!" said Axenia, "has the poor woman made up her mind at last to die?"

"Why, you know quite well that you helped me yesterday to prepare what was required for the funeral."

"What funeral are you talking about?"

Have you gone mad, Adrian Prokorof? You were at no funeral yesterday, but keeping holiday, though it is true enough that funerals are your holidays."

"But where was I yesterday, then?"

"You spent the whole day at your neighbour's the bootmaker, who was celebrating his silver wedding; and you came home so drunk that you could not stand, but went to bed directly you got in, and you have done nothing but sleep from then until now."

"Is that really true?" exclaimed Adrian, rising to a sitting posture.

"As true as it is striking nine o'clock."

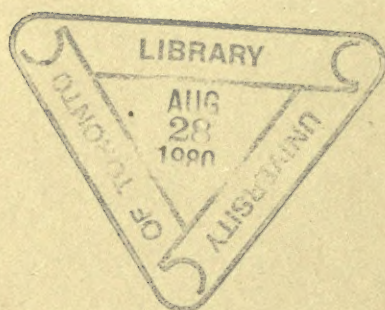
Prokorof listened to the striking of the

clock from the first stroke to the last, and it was only when it had finished that, as though at last convinced,—

"In that case," said he, jumping from his bed and putting on the dressing-gown which Axenia handed him, "go and tell my daughters, and let us have tea quickly."

But, as she went to carry out his orders, albeit quite convinced that what had passed was a dream and nothing more, nevertheless the coffin-maker wiped the sweat from his brow, as he muttered to himself,—

"All the same, this is the last time I drink to the health of my customers."





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